FORMS OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN KNOWLEDGE: STUDIES IN TRANSMISSION

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I, Wendy Monkhouse, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the question of the transmission of knowledge in Egypt through the dynastic to the Islamic period. It begins by describing the problem of how knowledge is conceptualized and structured within academic discourse, creating false dichotomies that have shaped a narrative of total loss and destruction. Transmission and continuity are instead proposed to take place within a dynamic model of transformation, and the study of a traditional locus of knowledge within the dynastic period, the House of Life, is juxtaposed with the long-term biography of the Egyptian tomb.

The House of Life is recognized as a problematic entity, particular issues being the nature of the 'knowledge' it maintained, and how much of the textual knowledge was eventually expendable. The investigation of biographies of the tomb leads to the study of the transmission of knowledge through practice, which can be traced through to the present day.

Contents

Note on the text

Arabic personal names, place-names and words in general present two problems: they may be reproduced by modern writers in varying or even unrecognizable guises; colloquial forms (such as those of Egyptian Arabic) simply have no standard spelling.

Well-known Egyptian place names often have an unscientific spelling that is widely used in the subject, and these have been preferred here. Similarly, a number of other names and words, such as Egyptian Arabic gebel, are so often used in English that they have been retained in their familiar form. For other names and words, an attempt has been made to follow standard writings, except that no diacritical marks have been included.

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1 Introduction

This country is a palimpsest, in which the Bible is written over Herodotus and the Koran over that. In the towns the Koran is most visible, in the country Herodotus.

Duff Gordon 1983 [1902], 67-8

In Reynolds and Wilson's discussion of the transmission of Greek and Latin literature, the palimpsest is taken to refer to 'manuscripts in which the original texts have been washed off to make way for works which at the time were in greater demand ... Texts perished, not because pagan authors were under attack, but because no one was interested in reading them, and parchment was too precious to carry an obsolete text...' (1991, 85). Lucie Duff Gordon's view of Egypt was that the country itself is a palimpsest in which all the previous 'texts' are simultaneously visible.[1] In her observations of mid-nineteenth century Egyptian life she cites not only the great texts acknowledged within the western intellectual canon (Herodotus, the Bible, the Qur'an, and Homer), but Roman mystery religions, the Desert Fathers, Coptic and pharaonic magical practice:

If I could describe all the details of an Arab, and still more of a Coptic, wedding, you would think I was relating the mysteries of Isis. (1983, 98)

It is impossible to say how exactly like the early parts of the Bible every act of life is here, and how totally new it seems when one reads it here. ... All the vulgarized associations with Puritanism and abominable little 'Scripture tales and pictures' peel off here, and the inimitably truthful representation of life and character – not a flattering one certainly – comes out, and it feels like Homer. (122-3)

At Koom Ombo we met a Rifaee darweesh with his basket of tame snakes. After a little talk he proposed to initiate me, and so we sat down and held hands like people marrying. Omar sat behind me and repeated the words as my 'Wakeel,' then the Rifaee twisted a cobra round our joined hands and requested me to spit on it, he did the same and I was pronounced safe and enveloped in snakes. My sailors groaned and Omar shuddered as the snakes put out their tongues – the darweesh and I smiled at each other like Roman augurs. (39)[2]

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[1] Duff Gordon (1821-1869) lived and travelled in Egypt from 1862 to 1869.

[2] Lane (1860) also described this dervish initiation ceremony in the 1830s. His description concurs with Duff Gordon's, but omits the snakes: the initiate sits with the sheikh, clasping right hands as in the marriage contract, and makes an oath of repentance, followed by a recitation of the Fathah (1860, 243).

In this approach Duff Gordon consciously departed from that of E W Lane (1860), by recording a body of data which does not differentiate between the transmission of high or low cultural practice from earlier periods in Egypt's history.[3] Winifred Blackman followed this holistic approach to cultural history and there is a strong affinity between their accounts of Egypt, despite many dissimilarities of purpose and status of the author versus scholar, and an interval of some eighty years. Duff Gordon's metaphor of the palimpsest is manipulated to argue for fundamental continuity, rather than erasure and loss of older material. It is framed within an ahistorical view of folk continuities which Blackman later articulated thus: 'I wish to make it quite clear to my readers that the customs and beliefs, and the general manner of life, described in this book represent those of the peasants only; by the upper classes they have, of course, long been discarded...' (Blackman 1927, 9) - as though time is not experienced by the non-elite. Marett puts this traditionalism in a more positive way in the Foreword to Blackman's book: 'The people of Egypt, having retained their self-identity unimpaired during at least five millennia, a record of which puts all other nations into the shade, can be studied now so as to frame a fair estimate of what, psychologically, they have always been' (1927, 7), thereby arguing that millennia-old practices express a powerful collective identity.[4]

The topos of an unchanging, timeless Egypt, primarily experienced by and expressed through the lives of the rural peasantry, has been widely discussed in the literature (Tait 2003*b*; Jeffreys 2003*b*; Mitchell 1990).[5] Mitchell has shown that the image of the twentieth-century Egyptian peasant, created by Ayrout (1963) and later Critchfield (1978), owed much to a political framework of American economic interests, Egyptian

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[3] Lane focussed his attention on the upper classes of Cairo: when he writes of 'the domestic life of the *lower orders*', he states that 'In most respects it is so simple, that, in comparison with the life of the middle and higher classes, of which we have just been taking a view, it offers but little to our notice' (1860, 192).

[4] Blackman herself emphasizes 'the characteristic conservatism of the Egyptian peasants. This conservatism is particularly apparent in their religious and social customs and their commoner industries, which, as will be more especially seen in the final chapter, have remained almost, if not entirely, unchanged from Pharaonic times' (1927, 21).

[5] Tait (2003*b*) principally covers classical 'timeless' view of Egypt; Jeffreys (2003*b*, 15) touches on 19th century 'timeless' views of the Copts (15); Mitchell (1990) focuses on 20th century constructions of the peasantry.

nationalist agendas, and western anxieties about rural tinderboxes from Vietnam to Palestine. But the concept of the unchanging, traditionalist Egyptian peasant incorporates a much older set of intellectual structures. This model depends on the hierarchical categorization of knowledge which begins in the classical authors, and is generally part of the wider phenomenon of Hellenocentrism. In Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* 3.16, Kalasiris the Egyptian priest enunciates the Greek view of wisdom:

> ...the common misapprehension [is] that the wisdom of Egypt is all of one and the same kind. On the contrary: there is one kind that is of low rank and, you might say, crawls upon the earth; it waits upon ghosts and skulks around dead bodies; it is addicted to magic herbs, and spells are its stock-in-trade; no good ever comes of it; no benefit ever accrues to its practitioners; generally it brings about its own downfall, and its occasional successes are paltry and mean-spirited - the unreal made to appear real, hopes brought to nothing; it devises wickedness and panders to corrupt pleasures. But there is another kind, my son, true wisdom, of which the first sort is but a counterfeit that has stolen its title; true wisdom it is that we priests and members of the sacerdotal caste practice from childhood; its eyes are raised towards heaven; it keeps company with the gods and partakes of the nature of the Great Ones; it studies the movement of the stars and thus gains knowledge of the future; it has no truck with the wicked, earthly concerns of the other kind, but all its energies are directed to what is good and beneficial to mankind.
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> (trans. Morgan 1989, 421-422).

While Strabo[6], Clement[7] and Rufinus[8] all recognized the existence of priests maintaining serious high culture in the temple milieu, a growing body of satirical commentary held up Egyptian religious practices to ridicule;[9] the division of high and low knowledge was established. The religious leaders of Christian Egypt, such as Pachomius, Shenute, and Moses of Abydos, on the one hand overtly circumscribed all pagan knowledge as low, and yet contrived to incorporate elements of it, reinterpreting and indigenizing it (Fodor 1992; Frankfurter 1998*b*). Shenute's contemptuous description of hieroglyphs, for

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[6] Strabo (*Geography* 17.1.29) describes a settlement of priests studying philosophy and astronomy at Heliopolis in the late 1st c BC.

[7] See Clement's well-known account in the *Stromateis* (VI.37.3) of the forty-two books of Egyptian wisdom carried by priests (Derchain 1951; Le Boulluec 1981).

[8] Rufinus describes the *sacerdotalium litterarum* in Canopus, 4th c AD; *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.26, (Thelamon 1981).

[9] Porphyry cites Chaeremon describing 'threatening the gods', and those who believed in it 'silly children'; *Epistula ad Anebonem* II, 8-9 (van der Horst 1984, 13). In Lucian's *Philopseudes*, there is a temple scribe who rides on crocodiles, and Juvenal (*Satire* I) ridicules Egyptian forms of worship (Reinhold 1980; Smelik and Hemelrijk 1984).

example - 'all their things being nonsense and humbug' (*P. Mich. MS 158*, Young 1981) – is at odds with his use of magic, prayers for the inundation, and power over demons.

A tacit assumption exists in the Egyptological literature that while the peasantry may not have changed their habits for five thousand years, these habits are not sufficiently interesting to merit proper study. The lack of interest in examining the relevance of modern or medieval Egyptian ethnological data to pharaonic society, noted by Jeffreys (2003*b*, 14-15), has come about precisely because *modern practices are categorized as low knowledge*.

In a recent critique of Critchfield's plagiaristic novel, *Shahat: an Egyptian* (1978), Mitchell unequivocally rejected this image of the unchanging peasant: 'The notion of a village life unchanged in sixty centuries is, of course, a complete fiction' (1990, 132). While this proposition seems reasonable, it risks obscuring any elements of continuity of thought and practice within the social category of the peasantry. The concept of changelessness, and by extension the more stringently defined 'continuity', should be examined more closely. Changelessness is bound up with the concept of tradition, and tradition is usually split into 'great' versus 'little' traditions. Redfield explained the meaning of this dichotomy thus:[10]

> Let us begin with a recognition, long present in discussions of civilizations, of the difference between a great tradition and a little tradition ...[11] In a civilization there is a great tradition of the reflective few, and there is a little tradition of the largely unreflective many. The great tradition is cultivated in schools or temples; the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities. The tradition of the philosopher, theologian, and literary man is a tradition consciously cultivated and handed down; that of the little people is for the most part taken for granted and not submitted to much scrutiny or considered refinement and improvement (1960, 42).

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[10] The 'great tradition' was defiantly espoused outside anthropology in English Literature by F R Leavis, who chose only five novelists to constitute it (Leavis 1948). Leavis' selection was immediately contested, with other candidates being suggested who formed alternative traditions (Horne 2004). The idea of a single canonical tradition, and its name, may have been invented by Leavis and picked up by anthropologists, but the subsequent debate about its value that took place among literary critics was not echoed in anthropology.

[11] Synonymous with other pairs of opposed categories: 'This pair of phrases is here chosen from among others, including "high culture" and "low culture," "folk and classic cultures," or "popular and learned traditions." I shall also use "hierarchic and lay culture"' (Redfield 1960, 41).

The intellectual history of Egypt has been neatly fitted into the paradigm of the 'reflective few' (priests, scribes, monks, urban elites) cultivating, developing and radically reshaping the great tradition, while the peasantry maintained its separate, less dynamic little tradition. This paradigm does not articulate what determines the content of either tradition – what is retained, and what is lost, nor the diachronic inter-relationship between the practices and thought of each. Redfield posited a dynamic relationship between high and low culture, 'two currents of thought and action, distinguishable, yet ever flowing into and out of each other' (43), but such a flow has not been recognized nor evaluated in examining patterns of transmission in Egypt.

The central aim of this thesis is to show how practices themselves shift between high and low knowledge depending on the viewer's perspective and historical context, and that these opposed categories are unreliable foundations for any hypotheses of transmission. Thus the deconstruction of the model of high and low knowledge is as overdue as the ongoing deconstruction of the related myth of cultural superiority of West over East, and ancient east over modern, which has contributed to the artificial separation of pharaonic from Islamic Egypt.[12]

1.1 The pyramid and the palimpsest: two models for the transmission of knowledge

Bowman quoted Duff Gordon's metaphor of the palimpsest in *Egypt after the Pharaohs* (1996) before returning to it in Wiseman 2002. He characterized the degree of interaction between Greek and Egyptian literature during the Graeco-Roman period as 'diverse and uneven, unamenable to any rule of thumb' (1986, 164), then linked this to a discussion of the intermixture of religions in the post-pharaonic period. He described this religious mixture as a pyramid, with 'primitive piety and superstition' (166) at the 'base of the

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[12] Jeffreys puts this particularly clearly: 'At the same time, and entirely in the western Orientalist tradition (cf. Said 1978), the myth developed of two kinds of cultural superiority: that of the west over the east, and by extension that of the ancient east over the modern. In this way the Egypt of remote antiquity was conveniently detached from the Islamic world and, like the etic study of that world, became the preserve of western scholarship...' (2003*b*, 4).

pyramid', the institutions and practices of the towns and villages above the base, and then confusingly the metaphor is abandoned just as we reach the top of the pyramid.[13] If Christian practice - whether ascetic, monastic, or that of the early Church formation - is at the apex of the pyramid, where would Greek pagan religion practised by the literate elite either in Alexandria or the provinces fit in?

Returning to the same letters from Duff Gordon and her idea of the palimpsest in 2002, Bowman seems to have moved even closer to her position – as she sees the mysteries of Isis at a wedding, Bowman hears the echoes of *P. Oxy* XI 1380 in Duff Gordon's own description of the presence of the ancient gods in Islamic Egypt: 'we might almost be reading an invocation of Isis, written some 1500 years earlier' (Bowman 2002, 194). In effect Lucie Duff Gordon has become the uppermost layer of writing on the palimpsest.

If a 'pyramid' of knowledge and its manifestations can be shown to be not only the dominant organizing principle behind most diachronic investigations of survivals, but a wholly inadequate and misleading one, it should be replaced by a model which connects varying types of evidence, removes them from the strictures of the dichotomy of high and low knowledge and permits greater insight into central questions of modes of transmission.

As a possible alternative, the metaphor of the palimpsest will be explored through two contrasting case studies: one, the *locus classicus* of high knowledge, the House of Life (*pr-ᶜnḫ*), and the other, a royal tomb which demonstrates a conscious dialogue with the past, and suggests a number of alternative routes of transmission of knowledge. Furthermore, this tomb is not unique, and the interpretative model of its reuse can be extensively applied to other tombs throughout Egypt.

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[13] The persistent trope of the pyramid may come from overuse of the concept of the social pyramid. For example Ayrout concludes his study of the fellahin thus: 'We now know the nature of the Nile Valley, and of the social pyramid and its pressures. The demands of both enslave the fellah' (1963, 136): the peasant is crushed by the social pyramid, as he once was by the construction of the architectural pyramid. Compare also Francis Bacon's hierarchy in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605): 'For knowledges are as PYRAMIDES whereof HISTORY is the BASIS' (2000, 84). In relation to visual culture, see Rice and Macdonald for a discussion of pyramids as the expression of a Jungian archetype (2003, 4-5).

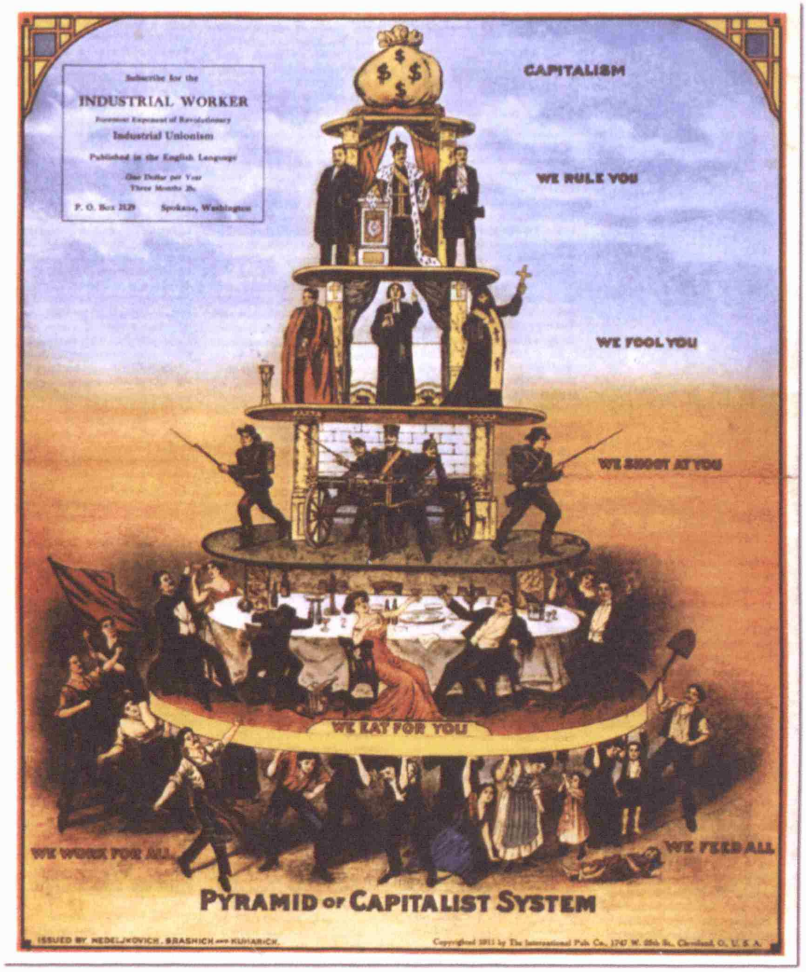

Figure 1 'Pyramid of Capitalist System', 1911

Issued by Nedeljkovich, Brashick and Kuharich, Cleveland: The International Publishing Co, 1911.
From www.laborarts.org

High cultural knowledge of the Egyptians has conventionally comprised theology, wisdom literature, and scientific knowledge; the central cultural institution proposed as the place of transmission of this knowledge has been the temple, and within the temple the House of Life. Since it was last studied in detail, seventy years ago, it has done duty as the inner sanctum of the Egyptian intelligentsia for three thousand years. A re-examination of the evidence will show that this picture is a distortion that has only been achieved by downplaying many of the attestations for the House of Life, attestations that suggest humbler activities taking place there. The *pr-ᶜnḫ* primarily emerges in this study as a chimera, demonstrating greater integration of different *types* of knowledge within the institution than previously accepted.

Secondly, it demonstrates the intrinsic weakness of the paradigm of high and low knowledge. Textual transmission and the way it communicates religious ideas and philosophy ('high' knowledge) takes place reasonably successfully at the House of Life for perhaps three thousand years, then the institution 'disappears' from the textual record, and the majority of that knowledge is lost. Hand in hand with this vanishing institution is the so-called death of three scripts (hieroglyphic, hieratic and demotic), together signifying the death of ancient Egypt. The dependence of the civilization on high knowledge, which is produced, controlled and transmitted in written form at the temples and perhaps by the *pr-ᶜnḫ*, has forced interpretations of Egyptian history into this cul-de-sac. It leaves no room to account for the steadily accumulating evidence of transference of religious concepts (into Gnosticism), direct borrowing of phrase and method (in magical texts), or the preservation of cults of indigenous gods well into the fifth century.

Weighed down with these ideological constructs of high knowledge and priestly wisdom, the search for the location and nature of the *pr-ᶜnḫ* is in danger of becoming a search for another of Egypt's lost or even mythical places, like the Labyrinth or the tomb of Imhotep. While intellectually engaging, the limitations of the evidence mean that it is necessary to look at types of transmission of knowledge found beyond the textually-focussed institution of the *pr-ᶜnḫ*. The ways in which the tomb in particular was reused have powerful resonances continuing right through the death of ancient Egypt, into Coptic and Islamic Egypt.

A strong current in the literature implicitly supporting periodization in the history of Egypt is the idea of rupture, and repression: for example the assertion that 'Christian Egypt shut the door upon the past and threw away the key' (Barns 1978, 20).[14] Post-Freud, many analyses of the history of Egypt acknowledge that 'when a person rejects something passionately, he may yet be much influenced by it unconsciously' (Griffiths

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[14] Interestingly, in the eastern Byzantine world, Cameron argues that a revisionist historiography has held sway over the last twenty years, 'which plays down the idea of rupture, emphasizes continuity over change and sees the full development of Islam as a product rather than a cause of invasions' (2002, 173); the author suggests opinion may be on the point of swinging back towards rupture (190).

1985, 27, writing about St Antony). There is a reciprocal dynamic between Freudian theory and the literature on ancient history which is worth teasing out; each borrows the other's ideas, or, in the case of the palimpsest, there is a happy conjunction.

Freud used the metaphor of the palimpsest to express the relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind, illuminating the continuing significance of past experience intruding upon the present. This can be contextualised within his lifelong use of the trope of archaeology for uncovering layers of the psyche (Kuspit 1989; Reinhard 1996). In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he wrote 'we may say that, like some palimpsest, the dream discloses beneath its worthless surface-characters traces of an old and precious communication' (1900, 135 n. 2, commenting on Sully 1893, 364). Historians' discourse may have privileged the 'old and precious' communications of ancient Egypt over the 'worthless surface-characters' of modern Egypt, thereby hampering discussion of transmission, yet Freud's use of the metaphor insists upon the relationship between past and present; his idea of the palimpsest of the mind later became a cornerstone of post-structuralist literary theories of intertextuality.[15] Some years later, in his essay on the 'mystic writing pad', a child's toy which retained traces of earlier inscriptions underneath the endless superscriptions, Freud used the analogy of this mechanical palimpsest to explain the relationship between perception and the unconscious, arguing that the discontinuous contact between them lies at the bottom of the origin of the concept of time (1925). One ramification of Freud's insight is that the past is widely identified with the unconscious, and the present with the conscious mind.

The implications of the idea of ongoing, repetitive access to the past, are wide-ranging, and form a new approach to a stale problem; as Frankfurter has judiciously pointed out in relation to Coptic Egypt, 'the problem with "pagan survivals" lies not in the general recognition that continuities existed between ancient Egyptian religious and Coptic religious forms (and some Muslim practices as well), but rather in what one does with these continuities' (2003, 342). By evaluating these continuities as visible traces of the

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[15] Barthes (1982, 201) and Derrida (1978) for example took up the idea of the palimpsest.

past, 'reread' and reexperienced for millennia, I hope to demonstrate the way in which a specifically Egyptian palimpsest might work.

2 The House of Life

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The idea of the 'University'

The clergy of the temple transmitted a comprehensive and normative body of knowledge about the ways to perceive, experience and understand the world and to conduct communal life.

(Finnestad 1997, 227)

The House of Life has long been proposed as the primary locus of intellectual life in ancient Egypt. The institution probably existed in the vicinity of large temples, although we do not know precisely how many. Despite a limited evidence base, admirably treated by Gardiner in his article published in the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* in 1938, there has been a marked tendency among scholars to assert that the institution chiefly engaged in the production and dissemination of sacred and esoteric knowledge, and to disregard the nuances of period, geographic location, and type of evidence available. The consensus, such as it is, has firmly characterized the House of Life as an institution concerned with 'high' knowledge – it is the 'university', the 'college of savants', the 'Art Universität', a place of restricted knowledge, staffed by an intellectual elite. It has been fitted into the sort of pattern Goody proposed for all literate societies, in which the priest is the 'gatekeeper of ideas', who 'has privileged access to the sacred texts ... of which he is the custodian and prime interpreter' (1986, 17). Even more is at stake now, with the idea of the university in ancient Egypt a key area of debate between Bernal, Afrocentrists, and their mutual critics. Lefkowitz criticized Afrocentrist claims of such an institution existing in ancient Egypt (1996*b*, 112-113). Bernal responded by defending a circumspect position on the 'university': 'The subject is not altogether clear, but equally clearly, Lefkowitz is wrong to claim that the Ancient, eighteenth-century and Afrocentrists' descriptions of "Egyptian colleges" are based *solely* on fiction' (2001, 389). Perhaps the issue of the ancient university has particular relevance for the Black Athena debate, which has largely been conducted between members of the academic profession versus those outside it (see Berlinerblau 1999).

For this reason alone, the House of Life suggests itself as a nodal place of enquiry into the transmission of knowledge. As a counterpoint to the kind of transmission of ideas and behaviour traced in the biography of the tomb, the House of Life provides material for a study in the primacy of texts in Egyptological discourse, the importance given to understanding their transmission, and the concomitant creation of a 'university' where this took place.

Since Gardiner published his analysis, further examples of textual citations directly referring to the House of Life have come to light, and further arguments have been put forward as to the essential character of the institution. Despite Morenz' recent appeal for a monograph on the subject (2001, 77), a synthetic treatment is sorely missing. The House of Life should be situated within scribal environments elsewhere in the Near East, comparisons with the *edubba* being especially important as well as recent insights into the post-classical legacy of Mesopotamian learning (Sjöberg 1976; Lucas 1979; Vanstiphout 1995; George 2005; Dalley 1998). Such a treatment should also benefit from the advances in our understanding of the complexity of the world of magic in Egypt, the work of Ritner and Frankfurter among others having demonstrated the changing identity and role of the magician.[16] Reassessment of the House of Life is also necessary in the light of publication of several major new texts, which are potentially closely associated with it. These include the long-awaited *Book of Thoth* by Jasnow and Zauzich (2005; see also 1998), the *Book of the Temple* (as described thus far by Quack 1997, 2000, 2003), and a number of other Carlsberg papyri from the Tebtunis archive. In the present instance, I propose to examine the evidence for the House of Life (see Table 1 below) in terms of what it can communicate about conceptions of knowledge, the context and manner of its transmission, and the implications of these factors for a reassessment of the idea of the university. Its ostensible 'demise' will also be explored against the background of the model of the death of cultures, textual survivals and cultural seepage.

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[16] See also the following recent major conference publications: Jordan, Montgomery and Thomassen 1999; Roccati and Siliotti 1987; van Bimsbergen and Wiggerman, 1999.

Date	Period	Suggested location	Attestation	Evidence No.	Subject	Category	Context
	Late Period	[Sais?]	Statue, Vatican 196	#1	Udjahorresnet	medicine; kingship; politics	
Dynasty 6	Old Kingdom	Athribis?	Tomb of [Mery I?], Athribis; Petrie, *Athribis*, Pl. 6	#2A	Mery I, *inswʿ pr-ʿnḫ*		linen of the *pr-ʿnḫ*
Pepy II, Dynasty 6	Old Kingdom	Coptos	Coptos decrees	#2B	Exemption from providing 'apparatus/equipment of the House of Life' for the Temple of Min, Coptos	non-specific	the apparatus of the House of Life
Dynasty 11 Sankhare Mentuhotep III	Middle Kingdom	Tod	Inscribed block from Tod temple	#3A	Khnum, lord of the *pr-ʿnḫ*	associated gods; kingship	Foremost of the House of Life
	Ptolemaic	Esna	Rec. Trav 27, 88	#3B	Khnum, lord of the *pr-ʿnḫ*, Esna	associated gods	
	Ptolemaic	Edfu		#3C	Khnum, Edfu, Chassinat VI, 147, cf 143		
Dynasty 12, Senwosret I	Middle Kingdom	Abydos	Cairo CG 20539	#4	Mentuhotep	kingship, religion, secrecy	Keeper of the secrets of the House of Life
Dynasty 11	Middle Kingdom		Tomb 17L20/3, Deir el-Bersheh; Bersheh II, pl.21; P. BM EA 10475	#5	Iha	kingship, religion, secrecy, writing, education	Overseer of the Writing in the House of Life, a man to whom all sacred ? matters are revealed; like a man who look[s at] goods/things. He opened up (?) the House of Life in its entirety (P. BM EA 10475)
	Middle Kingdom	[Abydos?]	Stela CG 20023	#6	Keku/ Ameny	medicine; scribe	scribe of the HoL Kkw son of Imny the physician/scribe of the HoL, Kkw's son, the physician Imny
	Middle Kingdom	Abydos?	Stela Leiden 49, V.67	#7a	Hnmw, Captain of the House of Life		
	Middle Kingdom	Abydos?	Hamburg	#7b	X, Gracious of Arm in the *pr-ʿnḫ*	writing?; religion	Gracious of arm in the House of Life
Dynasty 18	New Kingdom	Amarna	Stamped mudbricks, unregistered	#8	Amarna brick	architectural evidence	
Dynasty 19	New Kingdom	[Ramesseum?]	Tomb inscription (TT 111)	#9	Amenwahsu, scribe of the sacred book	religion; annals	Scribe who copies out the annals of the gods and goddesses in the House of Life; scribe of the god's book
Dynasty 19	New Kingdom		Tomb inscription (TT 183)	#10a	Didia, son of Amenwahsu	religion; annals; scribes	Scribe of the House of Life
				#10b	Ipu, son of Amenwahsu		Scribe of the House of Life
Dynasty 19	New Kingdom			#10c	Khaemope I, son of Amenwahsu	scribe; inscriptions of all the gods	Scribe of the House of Life; one who outlines the inscriptions of all gods in the HoL; god's father of Ra-Atum in the HoL
Dynasty 19	New Kingdom			#10d	Khaemope II, grandson of Amenwahsu		Scribe of the House of Life
Dynasty 19?	New Kingdom		Turin Museum 177	#11	Yuti	scribe	Scribe of the House of Life of the Lord of the two lands
Ramesses III, Dynasty 20	New Kingdom	?	Graffito	#12	Khons, Sehel, time of R III	kingship	For the ka of the lieutenant of the House of Life... Khons
Ramesses III/IV, Dynasty 20	New Kingdom	?Bubastis	Turin Juridical Pap., col 5/5; doorway from Qantir; Pap. Rifaud E/1-2; Rifaud C/4	#13	Harim conspiracy: 3/4 conspirators associated with the House of Life	associated gods; kingship; power/politics; scribe; medicine	The great criminal Messui, who was a scribe of the House of Life...the great criminal Iyroy, who was overseer of the priests of Sakhmet...the great criminal Shadmesdjer, who was a scribe of the House of Life; Nemtet MsDr, scribe of the House of Life

Table 1 Attestations for the *pr-ʿnḫ*

Date	Period	Suggested location	Attestation	Evidence No.	Subject	Category	Context
Ramesses IV, Dynasty 20	New Kingdom	?Abydos	Stela Cairo JE 48831, from Abydos necropolis	#14	Ramesses IV, Abydos	kingship, annals, associated gods; religion, authorship	I have reckoned in my heart [the] [annals?] of Thoth who is in the HoL
Ramesses IV, Dynasty 20	New Kingdom	?	Rock stela, Wadi Hammamat: C&M §240	#15	Wadi Hammamat Yr 2	annals; associated gods; writing; kingship; general knowledge	he viewed the writings of the House of Life
Ramesses IV, Dynasty 20	New Kingdom	?	Rock stela, Wadi Hammamat: C&M §12	#16	Wadi Hammamat Yr 3	general knowledge; religion; kingship	Scribe of the House of Life, Ramesses-Ashahebsed
				#17	Ramessenakhte, Sehel	writing	
	New Kingdom	?	Stela of Amenmose, KHM Vienna No. 51; probably from Abydos	#18	Parenen, son of Amenmose	scribe; books	Scribe of the HoL of the Lord of the Two Lands; scribe of god's books of the Lord of the Two Lands
	New Kingdom	?	Stela, Bologna No.1942	#19	Amenwah and Iny	scribes	scribe of the House of Life [both]
	New Kingdom	?	Cairo CG..	#20	doubtful and damaged		
	New Kingdom	?	Stela, Leiden D 83	#21	doubtful and damaged		
Dynasty 19	New Kingdom		Onomasticon of Amenemipet	#22	Amenope (Amenemipet)	scribe	Scribe of god's books in the House of Life Amenemipet son of Amenemipet
Dynasty 19	New Kingdom		P. Leiden 347, column 3, line 2	#23	Horus who is in *Śnwt*	associated gods; books	Lord of words, great one in the House of Life, founder in the House of Books
Dynasty 19	New Kingdom		Papyrus Harris = BM ESA 10042, column 6, line 10; from Thebes (?)	#24	Fording spell	magic; secrecy	First formula of all water charms, about which the chief lector priests say - do not reveal it to others, a true secret of the House of Life
				#25	Isis (Ankhefenamun's coffin)	associated gods	
Dynasty 22, Osorkon II	Third Intermediate Period		Reliefs in the Festival Hall at Bubastis	#26	Osorkon II reliefs	magic	Master magicians, the company of the House of Life'. 'Friends and master magicians'.
Dynasty 26	Late Period	Abydos	Statue, Louvre A93; Statue BM 805; offering table; statue in Mit Rahinah store	#27	Peftjau-herawy-Nit, Chief of the physicians of the south and the north	medicine; associated gods	I restored the House of Life and it was in a poor state
				#28	Petiese	scribes; writing	
				#29	Petiese - always with an answer	scribe	
Dynasty 26	Late Period	[Delta; Louvre statue is attributed to Baqliya; perhaps Sais]	Statue, Louvre A94; Statue, BM EA 1646	#30	Nakhthorheb	magic; secrecy	leader of the masters of magic in the House of Life
	Late Period/ Ptolemaic		Rock inscription on Sehel island	#31	Famine stela	science; religion; writing	I shall enter into the HoL, I shall spread out the *bȝw-rˁ*
	Late Period/ Ptolemaic		Bentresh Stela [originally erected in a Ptolemaic chapel at Karnak; Dynasty 25-Ptolemaic period]; Dynasty 30 wall inscription from Luxor Temple	#32	Bentresh stela	medicine; magic; writing	Bring me the personnel of the House of Life..
4th-3rd c BC	Late Period/ Early Ptolemaic	Abydos	Papyrus, BM EA 10051/5 (P. Salt 825)	#33	P. Salt 825, Abydos HoL	magic, associated gods	It is the scribe of the ... House of Life only who must recite it
	Ptolemaic		P. Leiden T 32, II,4 and variants	#34	Book of Traversing Eternity	religion; *kfȝw* / *dfȝw*	tes formules sont efficientes dans la bibliothèque, (de sorte que) ta renommé arrive près de la Maison de vie
	Ptolemaic		Stela Cairo CG JE 44065	#35	*Pȝ-dì-Sbk*, from Hawara	scribes	

Table 1 Attestations for the *pr-ˁnḫ*

Date	Period	Suggested location	Attestation	Evidence No.	Subject	Category	Context
	Ptolemaic		Papyrus, Bremner-Rhind (BM 10188) 29. 16	#36	The Apophis ritual	magic; secrecy; religion	It is a secret book in the House of Life, which no eye shall see, the secret book of overthrowing Apophis
	Ptolemaic			#37	Mendes stela	ritual expertise	
	Ptolemaic			#38	Sacerdotal decrees	writing; kingship	
	Ptolemaic			#39	Sacerdotal decrees - hymn books	writing; kingship	
	Ptolemaic			#40	Sacerdotal decrees - writing	writing; kingship	
				#41	Sacerdotal decrees - writing	writing; kingship	
Ptolemy VI	Ptolemaic			#42	Buchis bull	ritual expertise	
	Ptolemaic		Stela, Louvre C 232	#43	Imhotep, son of Petearpokrates; title and invocation	associated gods; annals? scribe	*ḥm-nṯr* of Thoth-dwelling-in-the-House-of-Life; "you who are enlightened in the House of Life"
			Stela, Vienna No. 150	#44	Imhotep, son of Petearpokrates; title	religion; associated gods; scribe	*ḥm-nṯr* of Thoth-dwelling-in-the-House-of-Life
		Akhmim	Stela Cairo CG 22070, from Akhmim	#45	Ahmose - dancer	religion; associated gods	
	Ptolemaic	Akhmim	Stela Cairo CG 22017, from Akhmim	#46	Haronnofre - teacher	writing; education	
	Ptolemaic	Akhmim	Stela Florence 7641, from Akhmim	#47	Pahet	scribe	scribe of the House of Life
			Stela, BM ESA 808	#48	Wennefer	scribe	king's scribe of the House of Life
			Stela, formerly in Lee Collection	#49	Petiese	associated gods; scribe; writing	servant of the great god of the House of Life
	Ptolemaic			#50A	Edfu, the House of Life	ritual expertise	
	Ptolemaic			#50B	Edfu, great artificers of the HoL	magic	
	Ptolemaic			#51	Osiris, Edfu	associated gods	
				#52	Seshat, Edfu; Karnak	associated gods	
	Ptolemaic			#53	Khnum, Edfu	associated gods	
	Ptolemaic			#54	Builder gods, Edfu	associated gods	
	early Ptolemaic		Setna I (P. Cairo 30646)	#55	Setna I , stelae of the House of Life, Memphis	writing	
	early Ptolemaic		Setna I (Cairo 30646)	#56	Setna I, stelae of the House of Life, Coptos	scribes; writing	
	early Ptolemaic		Setna I [Cairo 30646)	#57	Merab's birth record, Setna I, document of the House of Life	records	
	1st c AD ms.	[Upper Egypt?]	Setna II	#58	Si-Osire, saying magic with the scribes of the House of Life	magic; scribes	The boy Si-Osire began to recite writings with the scribes of the House of Life in [the temple of Ptah]
	1st c AD ms.	[Upper Egypt?]	Setna II	#59	Setna II, accusations of sorcery	magic; scribes	You two scribes of the House of Life, (or) you scribe of the House of Life, who does sorcery against the ruler [of Nubia], bringing him down to Egypt in spite of me!
1st c AD	Roman		Bohairic translation of the Bible	#60	Dream interpreters, Genesis	magic; dream interpretation; scribes	
			P. Cairo 58027	#61A	Myrrh-keeper in the HoL	magic; medicine; writing	
			P. Cairo 58027	#61B	Great mysterious ointment	magic; medicine	
				#62	Deir el-Bahari, Isis and Nephthys	associated gods	
				#63	Ostr Berlin 12980, Elephantine	scribe	
				#64	Ostr Berlin 6540	unpublished; scribe	

Table 1 Attestations for the *pr-ʿnḫ*

Date	Period	Suggested location	Attestation	Evidence No.	Subject	Category	Context
Ptolemaic			Stela of *T3-nfr-ḥr*, BM EA 184	#65	Magical protector = scribe HoL, living Apis (hieroglyphic and demotic)	magic; scribe	
			Griffith, Dem Graffiti of the Dodec., I, 304	#66	Demotic graffiti	scribes	2 x scribes of the House of Life
				additional examples identified since 1938			
Second Intermediate Period		-	Papyrus, BM EA 10475 verso	#67	[man] opening up the House of Life	fragment, unclassifiable	He opened up (?) (*st3.n=f*) the House of Life in its entirety"
Middle Kingdom		Abydos?	Inscribed scarab from Abydos	#68	Seneb, *sb3 n pr-ʿnḥ*	education	Teacher of the House of Life
New Kingdom	Dynasty 20		Title; exhortation in the *Instruction of A.*	#69	Instruction of Amennakht	education	Scribe of the House of Life
New Kingdom	Ramesses II		Tomb inscription (TT 183)	#70	Nebsumenu, king's scribe of the god's book	scribe	pupil of his Majesty, king's scribe of the God's-book in the *pr-ʿnḥ*
New Kingdom				#71	Ramesses II, Luxor	annals; kingship	
				#72	Khnum, Edfu (Derchain 1964, 39 n. 9)	associated gods	
				#73	Khnum, Denderah (Derchain 1964, 39 n. 9)	associated gods	
Roman	3rd-4th c AD	?	Nag Hammadi Codex VI,6	#74	Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth, NHC VI	scribe, writing of the HoL	write this book for the temple at Diospolis in writing of the House of Life
New Kingdom	Dynasty 19, Merenptah		Stela from Hermopolis	#75	Merenptah	kingship	Deine (des Gottes Re) Reinigung ist vollzogn im Hause der Lebenden, see, the House of Life [..] "See, the House of Life is [festoon]ed with foliage, like the Delta [.....]"
Roman	2nd c AD		P. Tebt. H. I V. 1-3	#76	Tebtunis library: Orte die Kraüter und Erde (manual of priestly knowledge)	secrecy; pharmacology (?)	Zu kennen die namen der [geheimen (?) orte [, aus denen Erde geholt wird nach den 'Lebenshäusern'.]
Roman	2nd c AD		P. Tebt. H II	#77	Tebtunis library: great gods in the House of Life	associated gods	Die grossen götter im Lebenshaus: die Götter des 'Nil-Buches'
Roman	2nd c AD		The Book of Thoth (ed. Jasnow and Zauzich 2005)	#78	The Book of Thoth; 24 references	writing; associated gods.	May one open for me the roads of going (to) the House of Life. [I have seen... the closed room of the House of Life with a door-post of iron; etc.].

Table 1 Attestations for the *pr-ʿnḥ*

Three specific underlying problems present themselves with this evidence: lack of periodization; unexpected absence of evidence; and artificial theoretical categories of activity. Two are problems of historiography, one of the evidence itself. To expand on these problems, firstly there is a lack of recognition given to the existence of evidence for a particular type of activity in specific dynasties or even longer historical periods such as the traditional 'kingdom' structure. Direct evidence for the House of Life exists for a period of time spanning from the Old Kingdom to the fourth century AD (approximately 2500 years), and while certain continuities can be identified, an assumption of changelessness cannot go unchallenged. Crucially, the House of Life furnishes a high-cultural parallel within dynastic Egypt for the model of low-cultural folk changelessness critiqued by Mitchell (1990).

Secondly, there is a curious absence of evidence for such an important institution, both archaeologically and textually, if the hypothesis is true that many key religious and literary texts originated in the House of Life. The sole example in the archaeological record comes from Amarna; the lack of other examples can only be unsatisfactorily explained, if one accepts the assumption derived from textual references that they did exist at certain specific locations (p. 39-40 below). Possible reasons include the suggestions that other Houses of Life differed from Amarna, were unmarked, and either have not survived or have survived in an unrecognizable form. The relative paucity of textual evidence is also a matter of concern; the institution was not so shrouded in secrecy that people did not refer to working there in their tomb biographies, or to its existence in public spaces such as the temple pylon at Luxor, or in a popular story such as Setna Khaemwas. Yet the problem remains, if complex compositions - onomastica, cosmogonies, annals, literary works, and the *bꜣw-rˁ* (see p. 63 below) - were not generated in the House of Life, no other *place* presents itself as a plausible alternative.

Thirdly, there is a historical but ongoing problem in the scholarly debate about the House of Life which stems from disagreements as to the boundaries of the categories of magic and religion, scientific and non-scientific medicine, and what constitutes education and the environment in which people learned in the ancient world. An artificial scale of

rationality is sometimes applied to define certain kinds of magical or medical knowledge as marginal or degenerate. These tensions can once again be directly attributed to the dichotomous structure of high and low knowledge. In fact, the evidence for the *pr-ᶜnḫ* shows the integration of a range of types of knowledge, applied in daily life as well as in cultic settings.

2.1.2 Physical evidence: the sole example

In assessing the views put forward about the House of Life, one should begin with the question of whether it existed at all in a physical sense. This minority view has been most clearly expressed by Redford: 'The elusive nature of this institution... together with the curious inability of anyone to localize it in space, in relation to any known standing temple, makes one strongly suspect that *pr-ᶜnḫ* is an abstraction, a cult organization rather than a physical building' (Redford 1986, 91 n. 72). The idea that the House of Life was simply an organization, perhaps supported by the various textual references to the staff or 'company' (*ṯt*) of the House of Life, is possible, and the motif of secrecy which frequently occurs in the evidence suggests that it could have been an elite society within the priesthood. In the pre-Ptolemaic period the existence of secret cults and societies, with or without initiation rites, is far from clear, although the search for Egyptian origins of both Hermetism and Gnosticism has prompted considerable discussion on this topic (Bleeker 1965 and 1970; Fowden 1986; Hornung 2001). However, the evidence also makes clear that physical activities, connected above all with writing, were carried out in a place called the *pr-ᶜnḫ*; moreover there is one extant building of that name which Redford's argument does not take into account.

Lying outside the Small Aten Temple wall, in the administrative zone south of the Great Temple in the 18th Dynasty Central City at Amarna, Pendlebury discovered the following structure during the 1933-4 season:

East of the Records Office lies the University, {*pr-ᶜnḫ*} as the bricks are inscribed. This is in a terribly ruinous condition, but the house to the north which seems to be connected with it is in a good state ... Here we found a number of ostraca inscribed with lists of royal scribes - presumably the lecturers of the University (Pendlebury 1934, 134).[17]

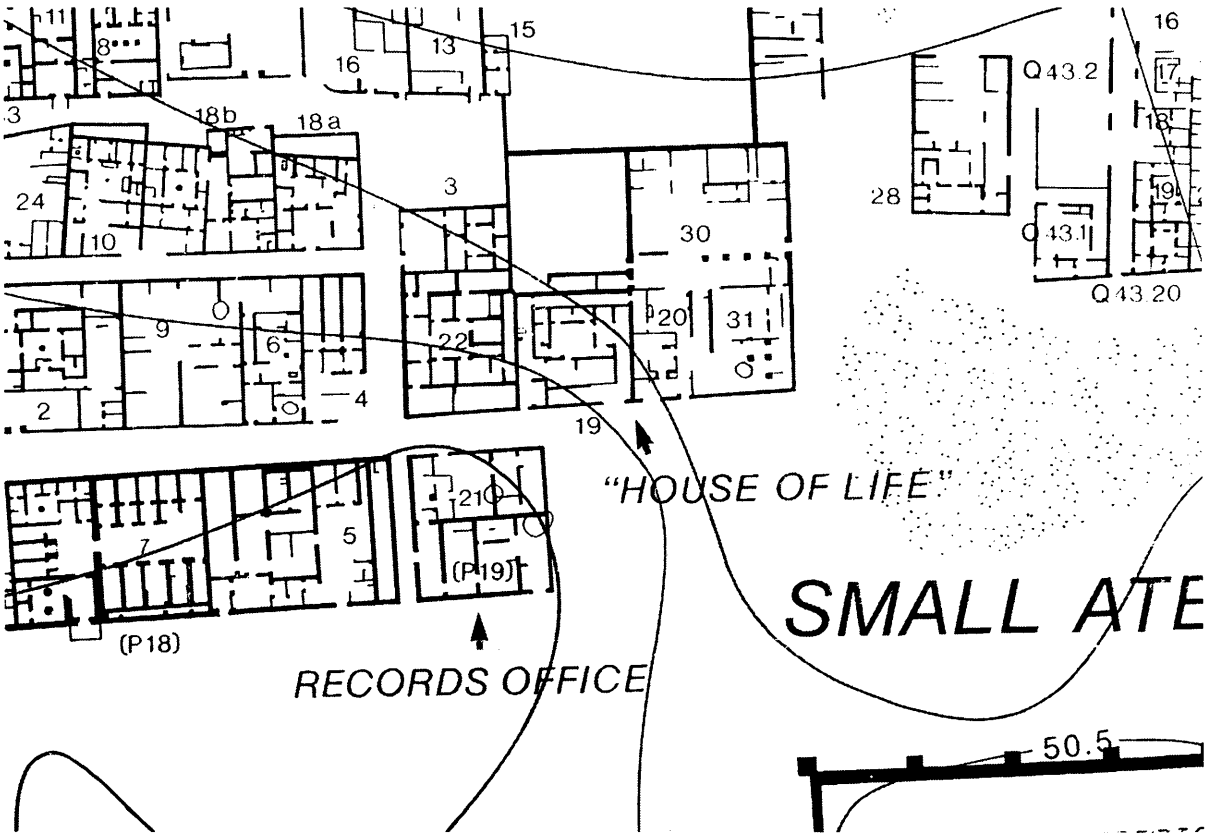

Figure 2 Plan showing the position of the House of Life at Amarna

From Kemp and Garfi, 1993

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[17] Pendlebury had difficulty matching up his numbering to Petrie's numbering: regarding Q.42.22 'the house to the north' (of the House of Life), he remarks 'neither this house nor any other on the whole site corresponds to the plan given' (1934, 134 n. 1).

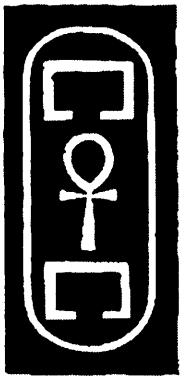

Figure 3 Impressions of stamps on mud bricks: the *pr-ᶜnḫ*

From Pendlebury 1951, pl. 83, fig. 6

Figure 4 Photograph of the remains of the House of Life at Amarna

From Pendlebury 1951, pl. 41, fig. 3.
'It resembles most the rooms of a don in an Oxford or Cambridge college' [sic] (1951, 115).

The bricks in question were found in House 19[18] (Figure 2), and were clearly stamped with the standard writing of *pr-ᶜnḫ* within a cartouche (Figure 3). Such bricks, specially stamped for particular buildings, are found in royal or official buildings from the early 18th Dynasty, through the 19th Dynasty, and intermittently up until the 26th Dynasty (Spencer 1979, 144-5). In 1933, the walls of the rooms were preserved to a fair height (Figure 4), but today there is scarcely more than a course or two of bricks left (B J Kemp, pers. comm. 2004; see Figure 5). The small finds associated with the building have not been discussed, perhaps due to their unimpressive nature – no literary or religious papyri were found – but they too merit reassessment (see Table 2, Small Finds from the Amarna House of Life on pp. 34-5 below).

Figure 5 Aerial photograph of the 'Records Office' and 'House of Life' buildings, *c*.2000

From *The Amarna Project*, www.amarnaproject.com

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[18] Pendlebury's numbering; Kemp and Garfi designate the House of Life as Q42.19.

Table 2 Small finds from the Amarna *pr-nḥ*

Year of excavation	Registration number	Provenance		Description				Decoration	Publication	Distribution			Comment
		Area/ Suburb	Subdivision/ building label	Material/s	Identification: key words	Notes on identification	Colour	Obverse	City of Akhenaten III	Registration card	Publication	Confirmed	
1933	33/111	Central City	The House of Life: Q42.19	**flint**	**stone tool: blade: serrated: ?sickle**				p. 120	Cairo	Cairo		
1933	33/112	Central City	The House of Life: Q42.19	**bronze**	**implement or cosmetic item: knife**	registered as razor			p. 120	Amsterdam	Amsterdam		
1933	33/113	Central City	The House of Life: Q42.20	**glass**	**miscellaneous**		blue	incised: ?hieroglyphs	p. 120	Cairo	Cairo		
1933	33/115a	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.22	**wood**	**woodwork**	length with one (?original) rounded end			p. 120				Q42.22 is adjacent to Q42.19
1933	33/115b	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.22	**wood**	**woodwork (?tool)**	cylindrical object with extending tang; published as 'mallet wedge'			p. 120	London, BM	London, BM		Q42.22 is adjacent to Q42.19
1933	33/116	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.22	**faience**	**?decorative element: floral**	tapering lotus with central aperture	partially green		p. 120, pl. LXXVIII.3	San Diego in 1935	San Diego		Q42.22 is adjacent to Q42.19
1933	33/119	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.22	**ivory**	**?inlay: animal: snake**	flat uraeus head		painted red: ?gold inlay for eye	p. 120, pl. LXXVIII.3	Cairo	Cairo	Cairo JE 62785	Q42.22 is adjacent to Q42.19
1933	33/120	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.22	**flint**	**stone tool: blade**				p. 120	Cambridge, Museum Arch.	Cambridge, Museum Arch.		Q42.22 is adjacent to Q42.19
1933	33/121	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.22	**travertine**	**stonework**	pierced disc; registered as button			p. 120	Otago	Otago		Q42.22 is adjacent to Q42.19
1933	33/123	Central City	The House of Life: Q42.19	**faience**	**architectural element: grape bunch**	with bronze ring for suspension	blue		p. 120, pl. LXXVIII.3	Cairo	Cairo		
1933	33/124	Surface find		**carnelian**	**jewellery: ring**			hieroglyph: wedjat					
1933	33/125	Central City	The House of Life: Q42.19		**textile**	some fragments of sack cloth			p. 120				
1933	33/151	Central City	The House of Life: Q42.3	**limestone**	**?decorative element**	disc with grooved cross; registered as button or reel			p. 118				Q42.3 is adjacent to Q42.22
1933	33/155	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.22	**stone**	**stonework**	disc or ring			p. 120		Cairo		Q42.3 is adjacent to Q42.22
1933	33/158	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.22	**wood**	**cosmetic item: kohl stick**	tapering with bulbous end			p. 120				Q42.22 is adjacent to Q42.19
1933	33/159	Central City	The House of Life: Q42.3	**faience**	**cosmetic item/vessel: kohl tube**	?cylindrical		inscribed: name of Nefer-neferu-Aten-Ta-sherit	p. 118, pl. LXXVIII.7	Cairo	Cairo		Q42.3 is adjacent to Q42.22

Year of excavation	Registration number	Provenance		Description				Decoration	Publication	Distribution			Comment
		Area/ Suburb	Subdivision/ building label	Material/s	Identification: key words	Notes on identification	Colour	Obverse	City of Akhenaten III	Registration card	Publication	Confirmed	
1933	33/160	Central City	The House of Life: Q42.3	**bronze**	**jewellery: ring**			engraved: snaked between winged uraei	p. 118, pl. LXXVII.2	Cairo	Cairo		Q42.3 is adjacent to Q42.22
1933	33/203	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.30	**bronze**	**implement: needle**				p. 121	Cairo	Cairo		Q42.30 is adjacent to Q.42.20 and Q42.31
1933	33/204	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.30	**wood**	**woodwork/ joinery**	straight length with flat (?original) ends and two dowel holes			p. 127				Q42.30 is adjacent to Q.42.20 and Q42.31
1933	33/205	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.30	**glass, variegated**	**vessel: bottle**	?body sherd	white and yellow on blue		p. 121, pl. LXXVIII.4				Q42.30 is adjacent to Q.42.20 and Q42.31
1933	33/211	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.30	**pottery**	**vessel: import: Mycenaean**	body sherds		black lines	p. 121	a: Cambridge, Museum Arch. b: London, BM, Graeco-Roman c: London, Stepney d: London, BM, Graeco-Roman e: London, BM, Graeco-Roman	211a: Cambridge, Museum Arch. London, BM 211c: London, Stepney		Q42.30 is adjacent to Q.42.20 and Q42.31
1933	33/212	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.30		**amulet: scarab**	large	green		p. 121, pl. LXXVIII.4		East Anglia		Q42.30 is adjacent to Q.42.20 and Q42.31
1933	33/213	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.30	**faience**	**miscellaneous**	irregularly shaped piece	green	covered in relatively large circles	p. 121				Q42.30 is adjacent to Q.42.20 and Q42.31
1933	33/214	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.30	**glass, variegated**	**jewellery: bead: rectangle**				p. 121, pl. LXXVIII.4				Q42.30 is adjacent to Q.42.20 and Q42.31
1933	33/215	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.31	**pottery**	**vessel: import: Mycenaean**	body sherd		black lines	p. 121	London, BM Graeco-Roman	London, BM		Q42.31 is adjacent to Q.42.20 and Q42.30
1933	33/226	Central City	Government Offices: The House of Life: Q42.31	**bronze**	**implement: chisel**	part of length with wedge-shaped end			p. 121				Q42.10 is adjacent to Q.42.20 and Q42.30
1933	33/293	Central City	The House of Life: Q42.20	**papyrus**				text with images	p. 120	Oxford, Ash.	Cairo Oxford, Ash.		

Small finds from Q42.19 registered by Pendlebury comprised a serrated flint blade, a bronze implement (originally identified as a razor), a piece of incised blue glass, a ring with a carnelian stone, and a faience bunch of grapes. The latter find may suggest a lost architectural scheme of decoration incorporating grapes, a larger version of the faience grape amulets popular from the New Kingdom onwards.

Figure 6 Faience architectural element in the form of a bunch of grapes from T.36.15, Amarna

18th Dynasty. TA 28/9/285, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin. The house (T.36.15) is in the south-western quarter of the North Suburb, one of Pendlebury's 'miserable hovels' which 'require little description' (COA II, 51). From *Global Egyptian Museum*

Figure 7 Pendant in the form of a bunch of grapes, from Amarna

18th Dynasty. 4.5 x 3.1 x 1.4 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum 8157

These grape clusters are known from domestic architectural contexts (Samson 1978, 87; Boyce 1995); a similar example (Figure 6) was discovered in a small house by a wadi, T36.15 (Frankfort and Pendlebury 1933, 51). Many more are known from the North Palace; at the Petrie Museum alone, there are 191 bunches of grapes and 173 grape moulds found at Amarna.[19] Taken together with the faience grape pendant (Figure 7) and necklaces (Figure 8 and Figure 9), an artistic vocabulary using grapes is common to bodily decoration, and architectural decoration at the House of Life, the Palace, and TT36.15. This vocabulary is extended to painted grape vines on plaster ceilings, seen at the North Palace and the Great Palace (Kemp and Weatherhead 2000, 498; 513).[20]

Figure 8 Necklace with 83 bunches of grapes, found at Amarna

UC 1957, Petrie Museum

Figure 9 Necklace with grapes, found at Amarna

910.48.15, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto

Bunches of grapes also feature as votive offerings, at the temple of Hatshepsut, Djeser-Djeseru (Pinch 1993, 8), and the Hathor shrine at Mirgissa. Tentatively, they are linked to the aspect of drunkenness of Hathor. At the same time, the data on wine-drinking at Amarna seems to suggest it played a significant part in daily as well as ritual life (Poo 1995, 27-37; Murray 1999). These symbolic associations are probably overridden in the

[19] Subhadra Das, Petrie Museum, pers. comm. 2007.

[20] Kantor (1945, 231) notes that architectural schemes incorporating grape clusters are also known from Gurob, Qantir and Sahure's mortuary temple at Abusir.

context of the grape decoration at the House of Life by the stylistic factors described above – the use of a common motif in the architectural decoration.

Finally, this lost scheme of decoration at the Amarna House of Life may be related to the so-called festal song of Thoth from the stela of Merenptah at Hermopolis (Roeder 1952; #75, Table 1 above[21]):

Pure are your limbs, clean [is your body].
your purification was made in the House of the Living (?)
See, the House of Life is [festoon]ed with foliage,
like the Delta [.....].

(trans. Kitchen 2003, 23).

The text implies an association between the House of Life and decoration with fruits or plants in the New Kingdom.[22]

The fragments of painted papyrus found in the House of Life, unpublished except for the brief reference in *City of Akhenaten* III (120), and now in the collection of the Ashmolean,[23] depict a scene with figures (some of whom are captives), and hieroglyphs (R. Parkinson, pers. comm.). It is unlikely that the papyrus will furnish much further information about the nature of the *pr-ᶜnḫ*, even assuming that it was not redeposited there by the wind.

Given that this building is the only, known, standing House of Life from ancient Egypt, it is difficult to know whether the fact that it is at Amarna distorts its value as an indicator of what a House of Life might look like in any other period or any other location. Kemp

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[21] All references in the form '#00, Table 1' refer to the Table on pp. 25-28 above.
[22] Roeder commented on the references to the House of the Living and House of Life thus: 'Gemeint muss eine Kapelle in dem Tempel sein, in der die kultische Reinigung des Königs für das Opfer vollzogen worden ist... Vielleicht ist hier gesagt, dass die Kapelle mit blühendem Grün geschmückt ist wie das Delta' 1952, 332 n. e).
[23] The fragments are currently on loan to the British Museum, awaiting conservation (Helen Whitehouse, pers. comm.).

and Garfi commented that the House of Life and the Place of Correspondence of Pharaoh (Q42.21 close by) are 'oddly unpretentious and unprotected' (1993, 61), indicating that archaeologists continue to expect a more exclusive, prestigious physical setting. One obvious hypothesis is that the House of Life fulfilled a different purpose for Akhenaten than for his predecessors or successors, with less dependence on religious tradition codified in a large archive of papyri. Therefore, it may have diverged from normal planning and building practice, in its size, location or spatial arrangements. Unfortunately, there are no references in the documentary record to the House of Life from his reign to help clarify this uncertainty.[24] There is also the uncertainty of the number of buildings that made up the House of Life at Amarna – was it either Q42.19, or Q42.20, or both, as some scholars have assumed; or did it include Q.42.31 and Q.42.30, which would have made it a far more substantial place of work and storage?

Two features of the Amarna House of Life are particularly striking: that it is built in mudbrick, and that it was probably decorated in the same way as a house or palace. This suggests firstly that the longevity of the institution did not primarily depend on being housed in monumental stone form, which would physically endure over long periods of time. Secondly, against expectations of an ascetic archive, it was a place that was deliberately made aesthetically pleasing.

If we accept that in all probability the House of Life did exist in the form of a building associated with a temple, the next question is which temples had one? Gunn took the view that it was virtually a standard element of major temples, however these were defined: it was 'apparently a department of every important temple, and to which the records often refer as the centre of learning, and therefore of magical and occult knowledge' (Gunn 1917, 252; followed by Weber 1980). There is reasonably strong circumstantial evidence for the existence of a House of Life in the following centres (see also the useful discussions in Burkard 1980, and Nordh 1996, 193-216, from which the conclusions presented here differ):

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[24] For a discussion of the extent to which the whole layout and development of Amarna is representative or anomalous as a town, see Kemp 1972.

Table 3 Locations of Houses of Life

Probable centre at which a House of Life can be proposed	Evidence number (see Table 1)	Date
Abydos	#4, #14, #33, #68, #27	MK, NK, LP, early Ptolemaic
Akhmim	#45, #46, #47	GR
Amarna	#8	NK
Bubastis	#13, #26	NK; TIP
Canopus[25]	#38, #39, #40, #41	GR
Coptos	#2B, #56	OK; GR
Edfu	#50A, #50B, #51, #52, #53, #54, #72	Ptolemaic
Esna	#53	Ptolemaic
Hawara	#35	Ptolemaic
Hermopolis	#31, #75	NK, LP
El-Hiba	#28, #29	LP
Karnak	#9, [#32]	NK
Luxor	#71, [#32]	NK
Memphis	#38, #55, #58	Ptolemaic
Sais	#1	LP
Tod	#3	MK

The texts claim that at a specified time two of these, in Abydos and Sais, went into decline and were restructured (architecturally or organisationally). To increase this group of possible locations, the evidence would have to be manipulated and stretched to suggest temple locations associated with either individuals' places of burial, or a particular king's political or religious capital (for example by guessing which House of Life would have been employed by Ramesses IV in the Wadi Hammamat expedition in #15).

[25] Nordh takes the Canopus decree as circumstantial evidence of a House of Life at the temple of Serapis in Canopus (197); the sacerdotal decrees may however provide evidence for the presence of a House of Life at least at the locations where fragments of the decrees were found, e.g. Kom el Hism, Tanis, Karnak, El Kab, and Tell Basta (see Simpson 1996).

2.1.3 Texts, books, libraries, 'school': the transmission of learning

THE Army of the *Antients* was much fewer in Number; *Homer* led the *Horse*, and *Pindar* the *Light-Horse*; *Euclid* was chief *Engineer*; *Plato* and *Aristotle* commanded the *Bow men*; *Herodotus* and *Livy* the *Foot*; *Hippocrates* the *Dragoons*. The *Allies*, led by *Vossius* and *Temple*, brought up the Rear.

Jonathan Swift, *The Battle of the Books* 1958 [1704], 238.

2.1.3.1 'Canon'

The transmission of learning is conventionally approached through studying the transmission of *texts*. Which 'texts' are implicitly referred to? While there are thousands of 'texts' in Egypt, found in many different forms (laboriously executed on stone, scribbled on a potsherd, worn on the living or dead body), a select group have been in some sense privileged by scholars, and given higher literary, religious or historical value. Their broad project has been to recreate an Egyptian canon, which like all canons is subjected to a constant process of interrogation (compare Leavis' *Great Tradition*, p. 16 n. 10 above). Canon is closely bound up with any account of transmission, so I will briefly outline the reception of the concept as it relates to Egypt, and discuss its relationship to the institution of the *pr-ᶜnḫ*.

Biblical canon, meaning which books make up the authentic Old and New Testaments, lends the notion of 'belonging' to all studies of canon. Cuneiform scholars have distanced their subject from the theological approach to canon, but have introduced gendered assumptions which are still grounded in the eighteenth century:

In literary studies, "canon" has been used to denote the corpus of compositions (literary or otherwise) that is regarded in one period as the corpus of great works, that is *all the compositions that a man of letters is supposed to have read, and to which he can relate in a meaningful way* (emphasis added, Veldhuis 1998, 79; see also Hallo 1991).

Assyriologists have refined their approach to canonicity by using features such as standardization, yet there is the danger that standardization can be uncritically taken to be synonymous with canonization (Veldhuis 1998, 80). The preservation of a remarkable group of literary catalogues from Mesopotamia (Michalowski 1984) has stimulated discussion of the canon. Rochberg-Halton's careful analysis of the transmission of certain

divination texts uses internal evidence to show their dependence on no less than three interwoven streams, *iškaru*, 'our presumed "canonical texts"', *aḫû*, 'coming from outside', (not 'superfluous'), and *ša pī ummâni*, 'oral tradition' (1984, 129-31). While there was a native typology distinguishing different types of texts, they could be combined together.

The other significant influence on the recreation of an Egyptian canon is the post-Augustan critical development of a literary canon, beginning with Johnson and continuing through Leavis (Patey 1988). Von Hallberg's edited volume of *Critical Inquiry*, published in 1983, described the situation in literary and art historical studies, but not in the field of ancient history: '...the subject of canon-formation is addressed now only with irony' (1983, iii). However, his description of canon is extremely apposite in trying to approach both ancient Egyptian canon and modern recreation of it: 'A canon is commonly seen as what other people, once powerful, have made and what should now be opened up, demystified or eliminated altogether' (1983, iii). As will hopefully become clear in the following discussion, both the idea of 'belonging' to a meaningful corpus, and the idea of a primarily literary (in the narrow post-eighteenth century sense) corpus, are potentially unhelpful glosses.

Canonicity in Egyptian literature starts with limited material. Gardiner took a typically pragmatic view of a 'canon': 'We have here yet one more proof how limited was the number of books that formed the standard literature of the Theban period; the "classical education" of the Egyptian schoolboy seems to have consisted of some dozen books, fragments of which recur again and again on ostraca and papyrus fragments' (1914, 106). Gardiner's sense of canon signifying the classical education of the Egyptian schoolboy informs many more recent Egyptological efforts to define the canon. The analogous use of canon as a set of rules governing visual art has been seen as a product of the elite by some authors – thus Davis argued that it was the 'power elite' who 'developed the canonical image in ancient Egyptian art as the expression of its ideology and co-opted the artisan-specialists specifically for the manufacture of that art' (Bianchi 1992, 329).

Shupak's discussion of canon in ancient Egypt (2001) begins with J Assmann's four-stage model of canonization (1990). A and J Assmann initially discussed canon in terms of its relationship to censorship (1987), associating this with key stages of standardization of the text (*Textpflege*) and preservation of the text's meaning (*Sinnpflege*). J Assmann went on to develop a synchronic model of canonization of a text, where the final stage was codification – 'freezing' of the text (1990). Assmann's model is summarised by Shupak 2001 as follows:

Stage 1	introduction of the text into the language (thematization)
Stage 2	writing of the text (textualization)
Stage 3	collection, preservation and copying of the text (codification)
Stage 4	selective and sanctifying intervention in the tradition

However, the slipperiness of a text's 'final form', the fact that fragments of it can escape and appear in other texts (e.g. from dream manuals to Sinuhe, see p. 78 below), where colophons lie (Section 2.5.1.1 below), and copies are rarely exact and more often tweaked, throw doubt on stages 3 and 4 in the transmission of Egyptian texts, and indeed Assmann rejected the existence of canonization of religious texts in Egypt (here influenced once again by the shadow of Biblical canon). The question of the literary canon has remained open (see Eyre 1990; Quirke 1996). Parkinson describes Middle Kingdom works surviving into the New Kingdom and later as 'established classics' (1997, 4), although the full corpus of 'established classics' was not sufficiently popular or widespread to ensure its preservation. The irony of the fact that some of the 'classics' referred to in *P. Chester Beatty* IV have not survived cannot be put down solely to the hazards of preservation. This literary catalogue, the nearest document Egyptology has to the comparatively rich and detailed catalogues of Babylon and Uruk, is often cited as *the* description of the literary canon (Loprieno 1996, 53-7), yet the works of at least two of the eight learned men 'whose names remain forever' are, as far as we know, lost. Shupak concluded that the idea of canon should be applied only to 'a select collection of works belonging to a single genre, namely wisdom, which served as the teaching corpus of the Ramesside school' (2001, 546).

Although canon is hinted at when there is tremendous time depth in transmission, the constant 'updating' of texts, either in terms of script or content, may alternatively suggest a degree of freedom in handling that does not fit with a 'canonical' group of texts. The closest the House of Life comes to being the home of a core of scribal knowledge is in its association with the onomastica and word lists. These lists present a form of compressed knowledge, of lexicography but also concepts, and form a tradition beginning in the Old Kingdom and continuing through to the second century AD onomasticon from Tebtunis. Linked to the House of Life through the colophon of *Onomasticon of Amenope* (#22, Table 1; p. 52 below) and the references in *P. Tebt.* H I and H II (#76 and #77, Table 1; pp. 117, 123-4 below), the onomastica may be said to represent a corpus of knowledge which was carefully and accurately transmitted, more so than any particular group of literary or other non-literary texts.

2.1.3.2 'Schools' and temples: education at the House of Life

The great tradition is cultivated in schools or temples; the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities.

(Redfield 1960, 42).

Table 4 Education

Evidence No.	Date	Short description of evidence	Category
#5	MK	Iha	kingship, religion, secrecy, writing, **education**
#68	MK	Seneb, *sbȝ n pr-ᶜnḫ*	**education**
#69	NK, D20	*Instruction of Amennakht*	**education**
#46	Ptolemaic	Haronnofre - teacher	writing; **education**

Like the House of Life, the Egyptian 'school' has been notoriously difficult to locate.

Khety's *Instruction* (the *Satire of the Trades)* has been used to support the existence of a school of writings at the 'Residence' (perhaps indicating the court or palace), a place of privileged children of officials, the 'foremost men of the Residence' (*P. Sallier* II, 4.1; Lesko 1990, 661). The Middle Kingdom composition, whether serious or tongue-in-cheek, describes an archetypal scene of a father giving advice to his son on sending him away to some sort of school.[26] The *ᶜt sbȝ nt sšw* is more in the mould of Tom Brown's *Schooldays* than Hogwarts, with its threat of punishment 'if you leave the schoolhouse / When midday is called, / And go roaming in the streets' (*P. Sallier* II, column X, ll. 2–3). Ikhernofret's autobiographical stela, from approximately the same time period, also refers to teaching taking place at the court, where he projects the self-description of 'the unique pupil of my [the king's] palace'. An unlocalized *ᶜt n sb3* (place of teaching) is attested from Dynasty 10 in the tomb inscription of a nomarch from Siut (Griffith 1889, pl. 14, 67; Brunner 1937, 60), and a precise location for a school has been very tentatively postulated at Deir el-Medina (Gasse 2000; McDowell 2000). Literary references are of little help: Truth's son 'was sent to school and mastered writing very well' *(Truth and*

[26] Helck (1970*a*) was the chief proponent of the view that the instruction was not satirical; for a recent re-assessment of the text, see Hoch 1994.

Falsehood, *P. Chester Beatty* 11, *P. BM* 10682, trans. Simpson 1972, 129), Setna 'grew big and strong', and was 'put in school' (Simpson 2003, 472), but the place of their education is vague.

This raises the question of whether some Egyptian students may have gone on from 'school' to the House of Life, and what the specific purpose of this trajectory might be. We can infer that some individuals whose careers we know about in some detail (the classic example being Bakhenkhons) seem to have progressed through their education without any connection to the House of Life.[27] Because Gardiner was not aware of three pieces of evidence connecting the House of Life with education, the case is now much stronger than it was formerly to suggest this took place there. The Middle Kingdom evidence for a teacher of the House of Life comes from a green jasper scarab belonging to Seneb (Martin 1971, no. 1497; Černý 1964, 184). Now in the Cairo Museum, it was found at the Temple of Osiris at Abydos by Mariette and first published by Newberry (1906, 135). It is inscribed with the epithet *sbꜣ n pr-ᶜnḫ*, which Černý translated 'teacher of the House of Life' (as opposed to 'pupil', reasoning that 'a teacher is more likely to be important enough to have owned a scarab bearing his title and name'; 1964, 184). Even if this argument is not conclusive, and *sbꜣ* were translated as 'pupil', it would still suggest that the House of Life engaged in education. But right at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, shortly after reunification, there is already evidence suggesting a link between education and the House of Life. This comes from the tomb inscription of Iha at Bersheh (#5, Table 1). The text published by Newberry (1896, 41, pl. 21) states that Iha was 'overseer of writings in the House of Life' (*imi-r sš m pr-ᶜnḫ*). Morenz compares this text with another papyrus recently published by Parkinson (1999*a*), *P. BM EA* 10475. This Second Intermediate Period literary fragment describes someone 'like a man who look[s at] goods/things. He opened up (?) the House of Life in its entirety' (*mi s m33 ih.wt st3.n=f pr-ᶜnḫ mi kd.f*).[28] Iha was also 'Overseer of the Royal Apartments', and states that

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[27] For a discussion of Bakhenkhons' age when he first went to school, and the suggestions that the phases of his career as a priest and a cadet learning horsemanship and chariotry were concurrent rather than sequential, see Jansen-Winkeln 1993.

[28] Morenz preferred to translate this passage 'wie ein Mann, der die *Dinge* sieht und für den geöffnet wird des *pr-ᶜnḫ* in seiner Gesamtheit' (2001, 79).

he was appointed to the post of instructor of the royal children, because he was "a man who knows the ceremonial of the palace, one at the top who dares to approach his Lord" (Janssen and Janssen 1990, 125). Taking into consideration his supervisory role of the writings in the House of Life, together with his role as a royal tutor, there is the suggestion that there was a pedagogical aspect to the institution in this period. The forthcoming full publication of the tomb of Iha by the Catholic University of Leuven will undoubtedly extend our understanding of Iha's professional roles, and his relationship to the nomarchs of Bersheh (Willems et al, forthcoming).

During the New Kingdom, further indirect evidence comes from the *Instruction of Amennakht* (#69), 1-12:

'May you be a scribe and attend the House of Life! Become like a coffer of books' (Posener 1955; Williams 1972, 216; Bickel and Mathieu 1993, 35).[29]

Amennakht lived during Dynasty 20 at Deir el-Medina. The documents associated with him indicate that he was Scribe of the Tomb (*sš n p3 ḥr*) for thirty years; but he was also a scribe of the House of Life (O. Caire; Gr.2173; Bickel and Mathieu 1993). He operated in several different spheres, and composed a wide variety of texts – judicial, administrative, religious, and literary, leading Eyre to describe him as 'a sort of Kilroy of the West Bank' (Eyre 1979, 85). His tomb is unknown, so there is no autobiographical evidence confirming that he himself attended the House of Life, but Amennakht's engagement with the world far beyond the temple and the range of his written output demolish any picture of a purely religious and segregated education forming the purpose of the *pr-ᶜnḫ*.[30]

The crucial question arising from Amennakht's exhortation is how did one become like a coffer of books? Perhaps through osmosis rather than any kind of formal period of study, which the use of the word 'university' tends to conjure up. Clagett endorsed this view: 'it

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[29] The authors claim that the *sš n pr-ᶜnḫ* and "scribe des recrues dans l'Horizon d'éternité" 'indiquent qu'Amennakht assumait une fonction de pédagogue' (1993, 36), which is an overinterpretation.

[30] For example Amennakht's will was written in a space on the same papyrus as the plan of King Ramesses IV's tomb, *P. Turin* 1885 (Carter and Gardiner 1917, pl. 29).

is doubtful that any regular courses were taught in the houses of life' (Clagett 1989, 26). Yet there are indications by the late period that an enormous store of knowledge had accumulated in the temples, which might require prolonged study, while in earlier periods the act of copying and recitation may have formed the basis of advanced learning, as attested elsewhere in the ancient world (Cribiore 2001, 2). Thus Finnestad, writing about the temples in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, concluded:

> The immense transfer of Egyptian tradition from one age to another depended on these scholar-scribes; it is both their work and the result of their work that we study. They worked in temple annexes that housed the libraries and served as places of study and writing. Naturally, the temple archives were comprehensive, and the libraries were large. In these centers of learning, a variety of disciplines were pursued: mythology, liturgy, iconography, arithmetic, geometry, law, medicine, astronomy, the interpretation of dreams, the study of the Nile and its inundation, and all other sciences pertaining to Egypt: geography, topography, history and philology (the language of the hieroglyphic texts was dead) (Finnestad 1997, 228).

While her statement that the hieroglyphic language was dead is not fully justified, her assessment of the range of study undertaken in this period is valuable. The final piece of evidence linking the House of Life with the inculcation of knowledge is the stela of Haronnofre [Horwennefer, #46] (Cairo CG 22017; Kamal 1904/5, 18-19; pl. VII; Kaplony-Heckel 1974, 238), a 'teacher of the House of Life' who lived during the Ptolemaic period. This comes from Akhmim, as do two other approximately contemporary stelae (#45 and #47 in Table 1), strongly suggesting that there was an active House of Life at Akhmim in this period. Haronnofre's titles included 'keeper of secrets of god's words', 'learned in every chest of the House of Life which is in the Min temple', 'scribe of god's books' and 'overseer of teaching of the children of priests, *wab*-priests [low-ranking priests] and those with entry'.

2.1.3.3 Texts, books, and transmission

Disciple: 'What is the book? What is its location?' (B 4/12)
Thoth: 'The sea is the papyrus roll; its banks are its papyrus-reeds ... Swim (?) in it, little one ... do not despise it until its lord (=Thoth) permits you to swim in it ...' (B 4/13-15, with omissions)

From the *Book of Thoth* (Jasnow and Zauzich 1998, 610)

Returning to Amennakht's simile, becoming like a coffer of books, I would like to look briefly at the role of 'books' in Egypt and more specifically at the House of Life. Firstly, there are the books that we have, and those for which only the titles survive. That the latter were not symbolic titles is demonstrated by various material evidence including 'bookplates', which name works such as '*The Book of the Moringa Tree*', and '*The Book of the Pomegranate Tree*'.

Figure 10 'Bookplate' of Amenhotep III, Musée du Louvre E 3043, for an unnamed book

From Friedman 1998, cat. entry. no. 24

The bookplates found at Amarna bearing Amenhotep III's name suggest there was a 'royal' library there,[31] the findspot being the Records Office which lies a few metres from the House of Life (see Figure 2, p. 31 above). Writing specifically characterizes many of the attestations of the House of Life, and the title 'Scribe of the House of Life' occurs in the majority of the data as the following table shows:

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[31] For a recent discussion of bookplates, see Parkinson 1999*b*, 51-54.

Table 5 Attestations of writing at the House of Life

Evidence No.	Short description of evidence	Category
#5	Iha	kingship, religion, secrecy, **writing**, education
#6	Keku/ Ameny	medicine; **scribe**
#7	Hnmw, Gracious of Arm in the *pr-ᶜnḫ*	**writing?**; religion
#9	Amenwahsu, scribe of the sacred book	religion; **annals**
#10a	Didia, son of Amenwahsu	religion; **annals**; **scribes**
#10b	Ipu, son of Amenwahsu	**scribe**
#10c	Khaemope I, son of Amenwahsu	**scribe; outlining the inscriptions**
#10d	Khaemope II, grandson of Amenwahsu	**scribe**
#11	Yuti	**scribe**
#13	Harim conspiracy: Nemtet, butler and Scribe of the HoL, and [x]	associated gods; kingship; power/politics; **scribes**
#14	Ramesses IV, Abydos	kingship, **annals**, associated gods; religion, **authorship**
#15	Wadi Hammamat Yr 2	**annals**; associated gods; **writing**; kingship; general knowledge
#16	Wadi Hammamat Yr 3	general knowledge; religion; kingship; **scribe**
#17	Ramessenakhte, Sehel	**writing**
#18	Parenen, Abydos	**scribe**
#19	Amenwah, Iny	**scribes**
#22	Amenope	**scribe**
#26	Osorkon II reliefs	magic; **scribes**
#28	Petiese	**scribes; writing**
#29	Petiese - always with an answer	**scribe**
#31	Famine stela	science; religion; **writing**
#32	Bentresh stela	medicine; magic; **writing**
#33	*P. Salt* 825, Abydos HoL	magic, associated gods; **writing**
#34	Book of Traversing Eternity	religion; *kfȝw / dfȝw* 'provisions'
#35	*Pȝ-di-Sbk*, from Hawara	**scribes**
#36	Bremner-Rhind 29. 16	magic; secrecy; religion; **writing**
#37	Mendes stela	ritual expertise; **writing**
#38	Sacerdotal decrees	**writing**; kingship
#39	Sacerdotal decrees - hymn books	**writing**; kingship
#40	Sacerdotal decrees - writing	**writing**; kingship
#41	Sacerdotal decrees - writing	**writing**; kingship

Evidence No.	Short description of evidence	Category
#43	Imhotep (Petearpokrates)	associated gods; **annals; scribe**
#44	Imhotep	religion; associated gods; **scribe**
#45	Ahmose - dancer	religion; associated gods; **scribe**
#46	Haronnofre - teacher	**writing**; education
#47	Pahet	**scribe**
#48	Onnofre	**scribe**
#49	Petiese (Lee Collection)	associated gods; **scribe**; **writing**
#52	Seshat, Edfu; Karnak	associated gods; **writing**
#55	Setna I	**writing**
#56	Setna I, stelae	**scribes; writing**
#57	Merab's birth, Setna I	**records**
#58	Si-Osire, saying magic	magic; **scribes**
#59	Setna II, sorcery	magic; **scribes**
#60	Dream interpreters, Genesis	magic; dream interpretation; **scribes**
#61A	Myrrhkeeper in the HoL	magic; medicine; **writing**
#63	Ostr Berlin 12980, Elephantine	**scribe**
#64	Ostr Berlin 6540	unpublished; **scribe**
#65	BM EA 184, magical protector, scribe HoL, living Apis	magic; **scribe**
#66	Griffith, Dem. Graffiti of the Dodec.	**scribes**
#67	Morenz / Parkinson EA 10475 verso	fragment, unclassifiable; ? **writing**
#69	Instruction of Amennakht	education; **writing**
#70	Nebsumenu, king's scribe of the god's book	**scribe**
#71	Ramesses II, Luxor	**annals**; kingship
#74	Nag Hammadi	**scribe, writing** of the HoL
#78	The Book of Thoth	**writing**; associated gods

While the simple title of 'scribe of the House of Life' may be a relatively generic title and should therefore be treated with caution, it must be allowed that it signified the ability to read and write.

Although the precise role of the House of Life has been vigorously contested, the most uncontroversial aspect of this role is that of scribal centre, where texts were produced and copied. From the late New Kingdom, the *Onomasticon of Amenope* (#22) states:

'Here begins the teaching ... conceived by Amenope, scribe of the holy books in the House of Life' (Williams 1972, 219).[32]

The subject of 'books' or 'writings' is referred to a sufficient number of times to indicate that this was a core function of the House of Life. Gardiner stated this clearly: 'Great stress is laid on the productive aspect of the House of Life, and we can have no doubt that this was the workshop where most sacred books and inscriptions were composed and written' (Gardiner 1938*a*, 175). More recently, Amer's remarks demonstrate the continuing consensus among scholars on this point, namely that the House of Life was 'the "scriptorium" where religious books of rituals, spells, hymns, mythology, etc., were copied-out and perhaps composed anew, as needed; and also, perhaps, a library-like repository or archive for such manuscripts' (Amer 2000, 1-2). However, disagreement emerges about the 'etc' in the above statement, and the literature varies in terms of inclusiveness. Ghalioungui summarised it cautiously, although he took royal authorship of the early works too literally: 'The first books of wisdom were the works of viziers and princes transmitting experience to their sons. Later there emerged a class of scribes, who wrote books of maxims and initiated their pupils into the secrets of correspondence, accountancy, administration, and logistics. A less aristocratic literature of tales, poetry, geometry, arithmetics, summaries, and encyclopaedias of medicine appeared. The role of the scriptoria called "houses of life" (per-ankh) in this new activity is not very clear but it was probably dominant' (Ghalioungui 1983, 87). Montet added the recording of technical and advances and cryptography to the list of scribal activities: '... the House of Life was a group of scholars, theologians and savants, who preserved religious tradition, edited the annals of the kings and temples, recorded scientific discoveries and technical advances, and invented cryptography' (Montet 1958, 299). There is no direct evidence for the

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[32] Interestingly, the Onomasticon of Amenope may share the same provenance as another document referring to the House of Life, *BM EA* 10475 (Parkinson 1999*a*).

invention of cryptography being credited to the House of Life, and the recording of 'scientific' information is supported only by the examples relating to the expeditions to the Wadi Hammamat.

Parallel institutions concerned with books and record-keeping should be considered alongside the House of Life. From Dynasty 5 there is a reference to the 'place of records', *st-ᶜ*, in the inscriptions in the tomb of Senedjemib (G 2370: Brovarski 2001, 90-91). Clagett suggested that this was the precursor of the House of Life, which is first mentioned in Dynasty 6 (#2A and #2B, Table 1; Clagett 1989, 25). There is also the 'hall of records' to consider at Amarna, the 'hall of writing' and 'office of writing' mentioned by Hori in the time of Ramesses II (Gardiner 1911, 6), and in Dynasty 20 there is a reference to the 'office of the writings of the Vizier' (in Papyrus Abbott; Black and Tait 1995, 2198). It is difficult to be certain to what extent these places linked to *writing* were purely administrative entities, and furthermore whether documents were deposited rather than created in them.

Figure 11 Slab stela of the king's son, Wepemnefret

Painted limestone. Giza, cemetery 1200, tomb 1201; Old Kingdom, Dynasty 4, reign of Khufu, *c.*2625-2500 B.C. Berkeley, Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology, 6-19825. See Der Manuelian 2003, 32-41.

The existence of another kind of temple library, the *pr-mḏ3t* ('House of Books') is supported by many documentary references stretching from Dynasty 5 (e.g. the stela of

Tetu, CG 20088, and the stela of Wepemnofret, King Khufu's son; Figure 11 above) through to the Ptolemaic Period. Sekhmet-Bastet is designated 'Mistress of the House of Books' on a Ramesside inscription relating to Bubastis (Habachi 1954, 495), whereas the gods associated with the House of Life are Thoth, Khnum, Horus, Seshat, Isis and Hathor; this lends support to the hypothesis that the two institutions were differentiated. Suggestions that the House of Life and House of Books existed alongside each other (e.g. Quirke 2006, 278, discussing Amarna, and Habachi and Ghalioungui 1971, 69, discussing Bubastis) are attractive but hard to substantiate before the Ptolemaic period, when the two entities are named in a single source. First, in the *Book of Traversing Eternity* (#34, Table 1): 'tes formules sont efficientes dans la bibliothèque, (de sorte que) ta renommé arrive près de la Maison de vie' *mnḫ ḥw.k m ḥ3w pr md3t / ḫpr kf3w.k m-ḫt pr ʿnḫ;* Herbin 1994, 50, 119-120, revising Bergmann's transcription (1877, 21). Second, in a description of the god Horus in Shenwet, 'lord of words' (#23), 'the great god who sojourns in the House of Life' (Borghouts 1978, 2),[33] 'founder in the House of Books'.

Not until the late period can the term *pr-md3t* be associated with a physical location, when we find standing examples at Edfu and Philae (Derchain 1965, 58-61, Chassinat 1928, Weber 1969, 131-134; Baines 1997, 231). Burkard's survey of 'libraries' (1980) points to their probable existence at Philae, Elephantine, Edfu, Tod, Karnak, Thebes, and Dendara. The House of Books may have been a room in the temple itself, or perhaps in the administration buildings where book rolls were kept and consulted. The Edfu list of books, in what may at last convincingly be called a library, totals thirty-five texts, some of which can be identified with texts on the temple walls and with extant papyri (Wilson 1997, xxx-xxxi; 353; compare the corpus of known book-titles in Schott 1990).

The existence of books or written knowledge at the House of Life has led some scholars to suggest that it functioned as 'a college of savants', 'in a sense a university' (Gunn 1917, 252) as noted above (on page 31). Pendlebury believed that the *pr-ʿnḫ* at Amarna

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[33] This epithet comes from a spell inscribed on a wooden tablet (Berlin Inv. 23308): 'Sakhmet's arrow is in you, the magic of Thoth is in you body, Isis curses you, Nephthys punishes you, the lance of Horus is in your head. They treat you again and again, you who are in the furnace of Horus in Shenwet, the great god who sojourns in the House of Life!' (Borghouts 1978, 2).

was the actual university (Pendlebury 1934, 134); Herman te Velde wrote that the House of Life was 'a sort of school for advanced studies', but qualified this by saying 'this does not mean that everyone who entered the priesthood had to take courses in the House of Life' (te Velde 1995, 1745). However, in Gardiner's view, 'the conception of the *pr-ᶜnḫ* as a training college, and still more the conception of it (to which some have climbed from the humble level of Schäfer's *Ärzteschule*) as a University, is a grave mistake' (1938*a*, 159). Recently, in his discussion of scribal training in ancient Egypt, Williams supported this interpretation: 'This institution was earlier thought by scholars to be a kind of university for advanced studies, but such was certainly not the case. Rather was it a center of scribal activity in which written works were produced, that is to say, a scriptorium' (Williams 1972, 220).

Shortly after the publication of Gardiner's study, Volten argued at length that the House of Life was a teaching institution:

> ... ausser der Magie war zum Schutz des lebendigen Königs auch die Medizin notwendig. Die Heilkunst war im Lebenshause unlöslich mit der Magie verbunden, was wir in fast allen ägyptischen medzinischen Papyri beobachten können; die Verwendung vieler Heilsmittel, besonders der ekelhaften, hat gewiss keinen empirischen, sondern einen spekulativen Ursprung, sie solten, ebenso wie die magischen Formeln, die bösen Geister, die durch ihr Besessen des Menschen die Krankheit bewirkten, vertreiben (30) ... Das *pr-ᶜnḫ* ist vom Anfang ein Kollegium, das das Leben des Königs und der Götter (Rê, Osiris) schützt (36) ... Das *pr-ᶜnḫ* war also wirklich - mutatis mutandis - eine Art Universität (Volten 1942, 38).

Thompson, writing about language and literacy in the Ptolemaic period observed that 'the hieroglyphic script conveyed mysteries for interpretation by the elite priestly class, whose long training in the House of Life fitted them with the literate skills necessary for their priestly role' (Thompson 1994, 72). It is reasonable to assume that mastering archaic scripts took longer as they grew further apart from the living Egyptian language, itself competing with the use of Greek.

Finally, it is worth considering Diodorus' remark about temple education in the first century BC: 'The priests teach their sons two kinds of writing: that which is called "sacred" and that which is more widely used for instruction. They devote special attention to land-measurement and arithmetic... For the positions and movement of the stars has

been the subject of careful observation among the Egyptians, if among any people' (I.53.2-4; Williams 1972, 214-5). 'Sacred writing' is frequently met with as synonymous with 'writing of the House of Life' from the Late Period onwards (Redford 1986, 66 n. 11), so it is possible that Diodorus was making an observation about the priests teaching their sons in the House of Life.

We are comparatively well-informed about Greek advanced education in Egypt, which took place with a rhetor, although the evidence for teachers is much more extensive that that for schools (Cribiore 1996). Regarding possible interaction or overlap between Greek and Egyptian education, Cribiore has recently pointed out that 'the question of the existence of schools associated with the families of priests of the Egyptian temples providing both Demotic and Greek instruction is problematic and deserves an inquiry of its own' because 'the evidence ... is unclear and remains mostly unpublished' (Cribiore 2001, 5). There is some evidence for interaction between Egyptian and Greek slaves at a school of medicine held in the private house of a doctor (Cribiore 2001, 25; Rémondon 1964). This kind of 'privatisation' of temple knowledge contrasts with an alternative, more grandiose, view of their development: Dawakhly commented that 'the functions of the houses of life have not yet been completely elucidated... they have been compared to the Museum (Mouseion) of Alexandria which might have been their direct successor (1963-4, 97; the source of this important suggestion is not cited).

In concluding this discussion of the question of education at the House of Life, it is possible to suggest that the specialized and even esoteric knowledge absorbed and exploited there may have been supported by an educational substructure elsewhere, which provided 'basic' training in reading and writing. Teaching of children belonging to the scribal hierarchy seems to be taking place in the Ptolemaic period, and this tradition may stretch back as far as the Middle Kingdom. But we are still far from identifying the 'lecturers at the University' that Pendlebury suggested lived in the House of Life at Amarna, and should perhaps instead identify preservation and teaching of written Egyptian language as a core activity in all periods at the House of Life.

Beyond this core activity, some of the most central and interesting roles of the House of Life relating to the transmission of knowledge are the performance of magic, the creation and maintenance of 'history', and the practice of medicine; these spheres of action will be addressed in the following pages. Other areas of great interest that cannot be addressed for reasons of space are ritual expertise, political activity, the relationship with the king, and the associated gods of the House of Life (the relevant evidence has been categorized under these headings in Table 1).

2.2 Magic, secrets and dreams

And yet, however distasteful the products of a disintegrating religion may sometimes appear, however often we feel tempted to use expressions like 'rubbish', 'refuse', and 'garbage', the study of magic to which quite a large section of the library of the Warburg Institute is devoted is fascinating and important...There are few human activities in the history of which an unbroken chain of tradition from the remotest antiquity to our days can be traced more clearly and conclusively than in the Magic Arts (Barb 1963, 125).

Scholarly terminology should be recognized for what it is: imposed descriptive approximations and not found universal 'truisms' (Ritner 1993, 238).

Sir James Frazer's separation of magic from religion still colours any discussion of the activities of the House of Life. Mary Douglas has described his influence as 'a baneful one ... we read through virtuoso displays of learning on the relations between magic and science whose theoretical importance remains obscure' (Douglas 1984, 28). The meaning of the Egyptian term *ḥk3(w)* validates a categorization of magic as a distinct practice, but in no way supports the placement of 'religion' above 'magic' in a hierarchy of high and low knowledge. Furthermore, an antithesis between religion and magic in Egypt has been shown to be incorrect and unhelpful (Bowman 1986, 188; Ritner 1993). Magic also crosses over into medicine, as *P. Ebers* and the *P. Med. London* demonstrate (Weeks 1995, 1794, 1796). As protection, or prevention, or the means of achieving one's ends, magic permeated life in dynastic Egypt to such an extent that it is entirely unsurprising that aspects of it were was transmitted into Coptic and Islamic magic (Laborde 1841; Worrell 1930; Grumach 1970; Dickie 1999; Bosson and Aufrère 1999; Hansen 2002*a*; Frankfurter 2003).

Aspects of the nature of magical practice in the House of Life will be explored through the textual citations listed in Table 6 below:

Table 6 Magical practice and the House of Life

Evidence No.	Short description of evidence	Category
#24	Fording spell	**magic**; secrecy
#26	Osorkon II reliefs	**magic**
#30	Nakhthorheb	**magic**; secrecy
#33	*P. Salt* 825, Abydos HoL	**magic**; religion, associated gods

Evidence No.	Short description of evidence	Category
#36	*P. Bremner-Rhind* 29. 16	**magic**; secrecy; religion
#58	Si-Osire, saying magic	**magic**
#59	Setna II, sorcery	**magic**
#60	Dream interpreters, Genesis	**magic**; dream interpretation

2.2.1 Crossing water: the fording spell

The everyday activity of fording animals across water seemingly necessitated magical protection against the danger of crocodiles (Ritner 1993, 225, citing PT spell 240, CT spell 836; compare the later Horus *cippi*, p. 97-98 below). Water spells (*ḥsw* or *sḥs-m-mw*) could be recited to invoke protection, and the Ramesside Harris Magical Papyrus points to a link between these spells and the House of Life, perhaps supported by the instance of the 'knowledgeable ones' in the Middle Kingdom *Story of the Herdsman*, who pronounce a similar spell. *P. Mag. Harris* (col. VI, 10 in Lange 1927, 53-54) describes:

r tpy n sḥsy-(i)m(y)-mw nb i{w}-ḏd ḥry-tp r.f m wbꜣ im.f n kꜣwy sšꜣ mꜣʿ n pr-ʿnḫ

'First spell of enchanting all that is in the water, concerning which the chief lector priests (*ḥry-tp*) say: "Do not reveal it to others." A veritable secret of the House of Life' (trans. Ritner 1993, 203; compare Leitz 1999, 39).

The context of this attestation is an incantation which is clearly part of a larger corpus – it is the 'first spell of all water spells' (Leitz 1999; Kyffin forthcoming). With its rubricized 'directions' to the practitioner, and uses of formal literary devices such as verse-pointing and parallelism, as a *text* it would seem to claim to belong to a professional world in which these conventions were understood. The writer describes it as a 'true secret of the House of Life', a claim which requires further elucidation and consideration of the effects of this secrecy on transmission.

Secret knowledge is a feature of the power structure of Egyptian society, found in a number of different contexts (Baines 1990). In the water spell it concerns magical

knowledge, in the form of spoken words, used to overcome physical danger in the natural world. The implication of the wording is that the provenance of the House of Life imbues the spell with efficacy, which is increased by limiting those who can use it. There is no implication that the spell should be transmitted from the House of Life other than by word of mouth. The question arises as to what other magic or incantations, used outside the temple context, formed part of its repertoire?

Figure 12 'The one who is on the water'

H Béchard, 'No. 19 La Chasse au Crocodile (Nubie)'; a group of Nubians with a captured crocodile. From *'Egyptian Mirage': a database of 19th-century "studio photographs" of Egypt, mainly in the collection of the Griffith Institute, Oxford.*

Sayce recorded that at Luxor, the Nile boatmen never get into the water without shouting because of the crocodiles' dislike of noise, and the men using shadufs shout or sing for the same reason: 'In one or two places the shadûf-song consists of words which are not Arabic and are not understood by the natives; they are therefore probably a corrupted form of Coptic' (1906, 198-199).

Magic is often a 'deed of knowledge', as in Djadjaemankh's magical act of finding the lost fish-shaped pendant in Papyrus Westcar (*P 3033 Berlin*), composed in Dynasty 12.

The king rewards the priest-magician, saying 'I have seen the deed (*sp*) of knowledge (*rḫt*)' (Clagett 1989, 211).

The 'knower of things' (*rḫ-ḫt*) appears in the Middle Kingdom *Story of the Herdsman*, where the herdsmen recite protective spells over their cattle (for a discussion of the range of this epithet, see Doxey 1998, 47-9). Ritner has argued that these are not 'educated herdsmen' (contra Goedicke 1970, 253), but professional magicians (1993, 229-230). He asserts that the title was primarily held by magicians, who were also priests: 'Stressing the central importance of knowledge (of spells, gestures, words of power, etc.) in Egyptian magic, the title *rḫ-ḥ.t* readily betrays its priestly affiliation, since the source of such magical knowledge was the priesthood and the House of Life... in Ptolemaic decrees the hieroglyphic *rḫ-ḥ.t* is regularly rendered in Demotic *sḫ pr-ˁnḫ*, "scribe of the House of Life"' (1993, 230). This is a little unsatisfactory, because the usefulness of the term 'knowers of things' lies precisely in its imprecise application, and it can simply refer to internal temple ritual: 'To be able to perform the ritual, to do things (*jrj ḫt*), required that one know things (*rḫ-ḫt*) ... When lay priests of earlier times claimed knowledge about religious matters and secret things, the knowledge in question was ritual knowledge, ritual formulae (*ḥk3w*), the "words of the god" (*mdw-nṯr*), and rites (*ḫt*)' (te Velde 1995, 1747). While te Velde argued that 'Egyptian priests had no parishes, and they did not preach' (1747), the evidence of images of magician-herdsmen and written fording spells suggests that either the priests sometimes used their skills outside the temple, or that knowledge of their supposedly secret water spells could escape from the House of Life.

Secret knowledge in pharaonic Egypt is an extremely interesting area partly because the concept of secrecy was an emic category of thought, and retrospectively because Egypt acquired the reputation of the greatest repository of hidden knowledge in the ancient world. The modern anthropological and theoretical approach to knowledge management is to frame it as a dilemma - how many people to share it with; too few, and the knowledge is lost, too many, and it may lose its power. Harrison has written about how the Manambu in New Guinea are obliged to share some details of the secret myths they 'own' in order to legitimise their system of territorial possessions, 'otherwise, it might

only take the deaths of one or two of the clan's elderly men for all its sacred knowledge to be lost forever' (Harrison 1995, 13). Another oral culture where the disadvantages of highly secret knowledge have been observed is that of the Dogon of Mali. Griaule's famous study (*Dieu d'eau,* 1948 and *Le renard pale,* 1965) based on his initiation into the complex cosmogony and philosophy of the Dogon, was undermined by the inability of later researchers to verify this cosmogony with other tribe members (van Beek 1991). This may be attributable to the fact that too few knew the cosmogony described by Ogotemmêli and Griaule's other informants, or that the Dogon were not prepared to tell their secrets a second time, or that Griaule himself had a significant role in shaping Dogon philosophy; we may never know. Critics of Griaule's fieldwork have posed the question which can be asked of all secret knowledge: 'The question then is how secret secrets can be and yet be a crucial aspect of any definition of culture. As shared meaning is a crucial aspect of any definition of culture, a secret not shared is not cultural, while one shared by very few is by definition marginal' (van Beek 143). However, the general knowledge of the *existence* and guardianship of secrets may not be so marginal, if that guardianship is seen to have a wider benefit. This argument has been made about priestly knowledge, in particular that of the House of Life, in Egypt (te Velde 1995, 1748).

In oral cultures, the vulnerability of successfully transmitting secret knowledge is widely recognized, due to a limited number of typically aged participants possessing it, and distortions creeping in due to failure of memory (Vansina 1965, 40-46). Literate societies have further points of vulnerability – how to write down secrets and keep them secret; how to maintain the ability to read those secrets, in particular when there are changes both in script and language, and what happens when the texts in which the secrets are preserved are physically destroyed. The transmission of all knowledge involves these problems but they are surely more acute when dealing with secret knowledge.

2.2.2 Secrecy and the House of Life

The existence of secrets, *sšt3* (WB IV 297-8), was explicit enough for there to be a number of compound titles in Egyptian in the form of 'Master of the Secrets of x' (the king, the necropolis, the temple). These secrets were probably simply the private business

of the king or temple domain, the 'classified information' of the Egyptian court and bureaucracy. From the Middle Kingdom, a stela from Abydos gives prince Mentuhotep the title 'master of the secrets of the House of Life' (*ḥry sšt3 m pr-ˁnh*; CG 20539; Ward 1982). *P. Salt* 825 (*BM EA 10051/5*), a Ptolemaic copy of an earlier text, describes some of the content of the secrets of this place which Derchain has described as an arena 'connue surtout parce qu'on y conservait les livres de théologie, d'astronomie, de magie, les rituels, etc., que l'on appelait à la basse époque d'un nom significatif "les âmes" ou mieux "la puissance de Râ", ce qui exprime d'après tout ce qui vient d'être dit, qu'ils étaient réellement les supports de la pensée qui conçoit et organise l'univers dont le soleil est le premier moteur' (Derchain 1965, 19).

These 'souls of Re' were books containing various kinds of temple knowledge; as noted above, at Edfu Temple there is a list of such books which included *b3w-rˁ*, and the priests of the temple are described as 'great scholars, learned in the souls of Re' (Wilson 299). From the first century AD, at the temple of Suchos at Tebtunis, 'souls of Re' including *itnw* ('mystic writings') of Ptah, are preserved, in the form of protective rites (*P. Vindob.* D. 6321 Text B; Reymond 1977, 34). These *b3w-rˁ* are interpretations of the *sšt3w*, 'secret writings', whose author is claimed to be the god Thoth (Reymond 40). Secret books or writings are known from both the House of Books and the House of Life. *P. Bremner-Rhind* (#36, Table 1; p. 72 below) states plainly that 'It is a secret book of the House of Life, which no eye shall see, the secret book of overthrowing 'Apep' (Faulkner 1938, 42), - and then gives the details of the (secret) execration rite. Similar protection texts, equally secret, are found in a list of the House of Books at Edfu, such as 'Overthrowing Seth', and 'To know all the secrets of the place of embalming' (Wilson, xxx). The portentous, and slightly absurd, aspect of the secret book no one was ever allowed to see, recalls the rooms at Philae which no one was ever allowed to enter (Mojsov 2005, 50).

The precept that 'no eye shall see' a secret book may therefore be interpreted as largely rhetorical, but it has led to much of this type of knowledge being termed esoteric. Crenshaw has drawn comparisons between a number of Egyptian 'initiation texts' (the *Book of Amduat*, the *Book of Gates*, the *Book of the Heavenly Cow* and parts of the Book of the Dead) and Mesopotamian texts which state that the contents are 'a secret of the

scholar ... the uninitiated shall not see' (1995, 2452). The esoteric tradition in Mesopotamia has been traced as far back as the third millennium in the early lexical lists by Westenholz, who argues that '"knowledge" of the words, the names of objects, in the lexical lists gave insight into the nature of things, a basis for power and control on various levels as well as the control and manipulation of information' (1998, 452). The *mudû*, the knowledgeable ones, are mentioned in the colophons of esoteric texts from the Middle Babylonian period onwards as the sole persons privileged to know 'secret' texts (Westenholz 455).

The idea of certain knowledge being restricted to a small and qualified group of scholars seems to have operated in both Mesopotamia and Egypt, but the extent to which this restriction was intended to give the 'knowledgeable ones' power and control is debateable. Baines has argued from the starting position that knowledge is power, and hence there is a general pattern of restricting its transmission (Baines 1990). This would place it in the second category of Barth's scheme of knowledge management, where 'the value of knowledge is enhanced by veiling it and sharing it with as few as possible' (Barth 1990, 641). Over time, the principle of weakening 'decorum' allowed previously secret, restricted knowledge, to be appropriated from the royal domain further down the social scale (Baines 1990). While this may apply to some of the examples he cites such as spells from the Coffin Texts or the Book of the Dead, there is no suggestion that those who used them saw them as less beneficial or effective – as they were shared by more people, their value did not decrease. The 'souls of Re' at Tebtunis were as secret in the Roman period as they had formerly been. Thus it cannot be said that Egyptian secret knowledge transitions from the restricted to the deliberately disseminated model, where 'knowledge has to be shared in order to acquire value at all, and it grows in significance as more people share it' (Harrison 1995, 11). It is more convincing to see a combination of both strategies of knowledge management operating simultaneously, which Harrison has put forward as a new model of understanding how societies manage knowledge.

Hornung's discussion of the secret lore of ancient Egypt highlights the significance of access to knowledge through understanding the language in which it was preserved: 'the fact that they could not be read served only to increase the prestige of the hieroglyphs, for

they were believed to embody the secret knowledge ascribed to the Egyptians' (2001, 13). Much of the secrecy is thus illusionary or accidental. In Herodotus the later Greek tendency to see Egyptian knowledge as inaccessible is far from pronounced, and as Tait has noted, 'there might have been a reluctance among Egyptians to reveal to Greeks such as Herodotus the line-by-line contents of religious texts, but their existence would not have been secret' (2003*b*, 29).

Foucault has commented that 'knowledge involves the discovery of secrets ... which gives the individual joyful power' (Morris and Patton 1979, 38). In the dynastic period, secrecy may not have been a mystificatory technique, but aimed at securing benefits for the whole society by means of the maintenance of cosmic order, through the 'joyful power' of those who held it.

Turning back to the secret magical knowledge of the House of Life, it can be concluded that the fording spell allies itself with the written knowledge guarded by the institution, which is nonetheless deployed in the outside world. Ritual protection is as necessary in fording a river as when carrying out the Apophis rite, suggesting an unproblematic connection between 'basic magic' and high knowledge.

2.2.3 Master magicians at the *sed*-festival – the Osorkon reliefs

Figure 13 'Master magicians, the company of the House of Life'

Line drawing of a relief from the Festival Hall[34] of Osorkon II at Bubastis, 9thc BC.
From Naville 1892, pl. III.12

In the *sed*-festival reliefs at Bubastis dating to the reign of Osorkon II (*c*.924-909 BC, Dynasty 22), there is evidence for the House of Life participating in one of the great rituals of court life. It is generally thought that these reliefs may be almost exact copies of Old Kingdom scenes, which might suggest that magic was an essential part of the activities of the House of Life from as far back as the Old Kingdom when the institution first becomes historically visible.[35] In the scenes depicting the king's first ascent to the pavilion (Figure 13), the procession is led by the priests of the House of Life, who Naville asserted 'know all about the ceremonies to be performed, all the details of the rituals, and who are able to prescribe what is to be done' (Naville 1892, 10). Three figures in the procession, shown in the bottom register, are named as *ḥryw ḥḳ3w ṯs nt pr-ᶜnḫ* (there is a superfluous *t* before *pr-ᶜnḫ* for which no explanation suggests itself), 'master magicians,

[34] The name 'Festival Hall' is used for convenience here; as Uphill notes, it is a misnomer for what is really a massive gateway between two great halls within the temple (1965, 365).
[35] On the Fifth Dynasty *sed*-festival reliefs of Niuserre at Abu Ghurob, see Kaiser 1971, and Martin 1984.

the company of the House of Life' (Wall A, left hand side of the entrance, Naville 1892, pl. 3). The procession is led by a priest in a long robe carrying a sceptre (Naville suggested that he might be the high priest of Bubastis), and includes pairs of priests with hands raised to their mouths apparently saying 'on the ground'.

Figure 14 'Companions and masters of magic'

Line drawing of a relief from the Festival Hall of Osorkon II at Bubastis, 9thc BC.
From Naville 1892, pl. VIII.22

In the later scene of 'The Rising of the God, and the Assembly of Divinities', magicians of the House of Life are shown again (Figure 14 above) among the 'friends and masters magicians' (Naville 1892, pl VIII). The content of the rolls of papyrus each priest holds may be the 'written magic' required during the *sed*-festival, which being a rite of passage was imbued with elements of danger. A final scene includes references to the House of Life, as its magicians give repeated salutations to the festival (Uphill 1965, 374). Nakhthorheb, a senior official and chief lector-priest from Dynasty 26, provides a later example of the probable continuation of the same role, 'masters of magic' (*ḥryw ḥkꜣt*) in the House of Life. Two well-known statues of this individual (one in the Louvre, A94,

Figure 15, and one in the British Museum, EA1646, Figure 16), give his title as the *ḫrp ḥḳ3 m pr-ᶜnḫ*, 'leader of the masters of magic in the House of Life' (#30). Other titles of Nakhthorheb reflect a continuing association with secrecy: on the London statue and another in Copenhagen he is 'Master of the secrets of the Temple of Neith' (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Æ.I.N. 947).

Figure 15 Nakhthorheb overlooking a bookshop at the Louvre

From Atlas database, Musée du Louvre, http://cartelfr.louvre.fr

Figure 16 Nakhthorheb, BM EA 1646

From British Museum Compass database

The *public* display of secret knowledge belonging to the designated scribes at Osorkon's festival, and Nakhthorheb's similarly public display of titles, are characteristic of Egyptian religious ritual. The king's progress on the Bubastis reliefs from public to secret performance is again exposed by documenting the secret elements so explicitly. Although there may have been further levels of secret magical knowledge required when the king entered the tomb for the climax of the rite (Uphill 1965, 377), the representations and texts are finely balanced between giving information to the viewer/reader, and simultaneously insisting that it is confidential.

2.2.4 Renewal of the god at the Abydos House of Life

Prior to the publication of Derchain's study of *P. BM* 10051, also known by its former number *P. Salt* 825, Gardiner wrote that 'ancient Egypt has bequeathed to us no more cryptic religious book' (1938*a*, 167). Derchain however reassessed the nature of the text, finding 'les restes d'un authentique rituel, au lieu d'être ce manuel de magie d'assez basse qualité qu'on y avait vu jusqu'ici' (1965, ix). He understood the papyrus to be an aide-mémoire for the ceremonial official in charge of rites of renewal taking place at the House of Life in Abydos. The text implies that these rites were of the most profound religious importance: 'ces rites avaient pour effet, nous enseigne encore le papyrus, de maintenir l'ordre cosmique et sa continuité. Grâce à eux, le ciel ne tomberait pas sur la terre, le soleil continuerait sa course au ciel, le Nil ne se dessècherait pas' (Derchain 1965, 19). Derchain dated the papyrus to the early Ptolemaic period (1965, 127). Its missing opening section was identified and published in 1988 by Herbin, in the separately accessioned manuscript *P. BM* 10090 (Herbin 1988).

Figure 17 Vignette of the House of Life, *P BM* EA 10051/5

From British Museum Compass database

The House of Life is referred to directly in a passage within the chapter named 'Le livre magique "Fin de l'ouvrage"' (1965, 139) which is to be recited only by a scribe of the House of Life:

'C'est un livre secret, qui fait échouer les charmes, qui lie les conjurations, qui arrête les conjurations, qui intimide l'univers entier. Il contient la vie, il contient la mort. Ne le révèle pas, car celui qui le révèle meurt de mort subite ou immédiatement assassiné ... C'est le scribe de l'administration qu'on appelle maison de vie (seul) qui doit le réciter' (1965, 139).

A description follows of the physical construction of the House of Life and activities taking place within it, accompanied by a schematic architectural plan which closely corresponds to the details in the text (Figure 17). Gardiner took this passage to be essentially prescriptive, describing an ideal structure, whereas Derchain saw a mixture of material and theological views of 'la maison de la vie réelle':

'AS FOR the House of Life, it shall be in Abydos. Build it in four bodies, the inner body being of covered reeds (?). As for the four [*pr* sign] and the [ꜥ*nḫ* sign] – as for the ꜥ*nḫy* ("the living one"), he is Osiris, and as for the four [*pr* sign]'s <they are> Isis, Nephthys, Horus and Thoth, Isis being on one side and Nephthys on the other; Horus on one (side) and Thoth on the other. These are the four sides. Gēb is its ground (*i.e.* floor) and Nut its heaven (*i.e.* ceiling). The hidden one who rests within it is the Great God. The four outer bodies consist of a stone that contains two wings, and its lower part (*i.e.* its floor?) is sand, and its outside has severally four doors, one south, one north, one west, and one east. It shall be very hidden and very large. It shall not be known, nor shall it be seen; but the sun shall look upon its mystery. The people who enter into it are the staff of Rēʿ and the scribes of the House of Life ... The books that are in it are the emanations (*bꜣw*) of Rēʿ wherewith to keep alive this god and to overthrow his enemies. AS FOR the staff of the House of Life who are in it, they are the followers of Re protecting his son Osiris every day' (Gardiner 1938*a*, 168).

As Derchain has pointed out, the construction is conceived of as a microcosm of the universe. Clearly this construction bears no physical resemblance to the remains of an actual House of Life in Amarna, the ground plan of which makes no attempt towards symmetry and which was very probably roofed over. No structure resembling the description in *P. BM* 10051 has been identified at Abydos, although David proposed a location within the Second Osiris Hall, on the grounds that it is closely connected to the complex of chambers dedicated to the Osiris cult and lies in a part of the temple accessible only through the Osiris chapel (David 1981, 148).

While the official temple context of the rite described in the papyrus is certain, its methodology for subjugating the universe derives from the standard execration repertoire: 'with its dismembered, burned and encased wax figures, the ceremony for the "House of Life" ... readily reveals its origin in the execration rite...' (Ritner 1993, 176).[36] Like the water spells, the ritual of *P. BM* 10051 belongs to both the world of the temple, and the world of magic outside the temple.

2.2.5 The Apophis ritual - Bremner-Rhind

A further 'official' temple rite linked to the House of Life is found in Papyrus Bremner-Rhind's (*P. BM* 10188) description of the Apophis ritual, dating to the late period although with a possible Middle Kingdom origin (Posener 1975, 406). The ritual book is described thus in line 29, 16:

'It is a secret book in the House of Life, which no eye shall see, the secret book of overthrowing Apophis'

(trans. Gardiner 1938*a*, 169; Posener rightly corrected Faulkner's reading *pr-ḥḏ* to *pr-ᶜnḫ*).

Ritner observed that the Apophis ritual 'rapidly acquires the character of a cultural institution, with participation in the rite extended to "private individuals" for both funerary and daily life concerns by the New Kingdom, before becoming an all encompassing apotropaic temple ritual in the Late Period' (Ritner 1993, 211). The papyrus is believed to come from the tomb of the writer of the 'Colophon', the god's father and prophet Nesmin (Faulkner 1936, 121; Peck 2000), but this provenance does not alter its priestly, temple origin. Although it has been suggested that the ritual must have served some kind of generic mortuary function (Quack 2002, 59-60; Jay 2007, 95), other possibilities exist – such as the book indicating a personal connection between the owner (or an ancestor) and the performance of ritual in the temple. As in the fording spell (#24 above), secrecy is emphasized, 'a virtue in itself because of the mystique it gave to the

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[36] See Koenig 1994, Ch IV, for execration rites outside the temple; Borghouts uses a royal execration rite and excludes private ones (1978, VII n. 2).

magician' (Pinch 1994, 62), and again secrecy is linked to efficacy - the fewer people that knew the rite, the greater its power when enacted. This idea is expressed in *The Admonitions of Ipuwer*: 'Indeed, magical spells are divulged; oracles and spells of seeking (?) are made dangerous because they are remembered by men' (Ritner 1993, 202). Harrison has described competition for magical knowledge among participants in the Trobriands and Kula system as 'a zero-sum game taking place in a closed universe of values' (Harrison 1992, 231), and this seems to apply to Ipuwer's attitude towards spells. Chaos in Egyptian society is exemplified by the intellectual property of the priestly magician being expropriated by the general public.

2.2.6 Fictional magicians - Setna II and *P. BM EA* 10475 verso

Literary evidence of magical activity at the House of Life comes mainly from the Demotic *Setna* tales, which are set in the reign of Ramesses II but were probably written in the Ptolemaic period, again raising the question of whether the text can be said to reflect temple practices of the earlier period. The historical Setna Khaemwas was high priest of Memphis, and was credited with advanced magical powers after his death. In Setna II (*P. BM* 604), Setna's son Si-Osire, who is unusually precocious and will become a great magician,

> '... grew big and strong; he was put in school. [After a short time he surpassed] the scribe who had been given him for instruction. The boy Si-Osire began to recite writings with the scribes of the House of Life in [the temple of Ptah]' (translation Lichtheim 1980, 139; Griffith 1900, colI/II-13, 147).

The story shows another way in which the written magic of the House of Life could be applied *outside* the priestly context, transmission being effected through oral repetition. This counterbalances the characterization of the institution as isolated and disassociated from the world, which seems to lie behind te Velde's remark that 'with the emergence of the priesthood as a separate professional group, the pursuit of sacred knowledge became restricted increasingly to specialized priests or theologians and to an institution within the temple precinct called the House of Life' (te Velde 1995, 1745).

Later in the same tale, scribes and/or a scribe of the House of Life are accused of sorcery by Horus-son-of-the-Nubian-woman (Griffith 1900, col 617-8, 195). Although the sense is not entirely clear, the Nubian sorcerer seems to address Horus-son-of-Paneshe (who is acting for the Egyptian pharaoh) as a scribe affiliated with the House of Life:

'He [the Nubian magician] came to the court before Pharaoh and said in a loud voice: "Woe to you who makes sorcery against me in the court, in the place where Pharaoh is, with the people of Egypt looking to him! You two scribes of the House of Life, (or) you scribe of the House of Life, who does sorcery against the ruler [of Nubia], bringing him down to Egypt in spite of me!'" (Lichtheim 1980, 148).

Within the conventions of literary narrative, Horus-son-of-Paneshe is descended from the 'priestly "super-wizards"' of earlier Egyptian literature such as Djedy and Meryre (Frankfurter 2000). If the interpretation that he belongs to the House of Life is correct (supported by the fact that he is in fact Si-Osire in disguise whom we know to have been educated there), this information suggests that the House of Life was considered to be the repository of superior, if not invincible, magical knowledge, at the time it was composed. Frankfurter has suggested that 'although these legends were composed and collected among the priests themselves, one would presume that they also reflected popular lore about the Egyptian priest's thaumaturgical potential: he could be a figure of awesome, sometimes dangerous powers' (Frankfurter 2000, 2). Given that the Setna cycle may well have a Theban provenance (Tait 1995, 180), the attitudes it expresses towards the House of Life should perhaps be specifically connected to an Upper Egyptian milieu.

An earlier literary fragment, BM EA 10475 verso (#67), which may be compared with these elements of the Setna story, involves a man interacting with the House of Life:

"weary (?) like a man who look[s at] goods/things
He opened up (?) (*st3.n=f*) the House of Life in its entirety"

(X+4.1; Parkinson 1999*a*, 192)

These images of the *pr-ᶜnḫ* as a place where knowledge was acquired that occur in literary contexts seem to correspond quite closely with other non-literary attestations.

2.2.7 The interpretation of dreams

During the third century AD, the interchangeability of the role of magician and ritual expert at the House of Life that can be seen in the pharaonic period was necessarily affected by Roman attitudes towards magic. Rome's attitude towards native Egyptian religion was primarily hostile: 'the term "magic" itself is indicative of this xenophobia; derived from the Zoroastrian religion of the Magi, magia had come to signify fraudulent trickery or demonic sorcery' (Ritner 1993, 217). It is therefore intriguing that the third-century evidence in the Bohairic translation of the Septuagint shows the Coptic redactors using the word *sphransh* ⲥⲫⲣⲁⲛϣ (Lucchesi 1975, 254) to stand for 'the interpreters of dreams' (#60, Table 1).

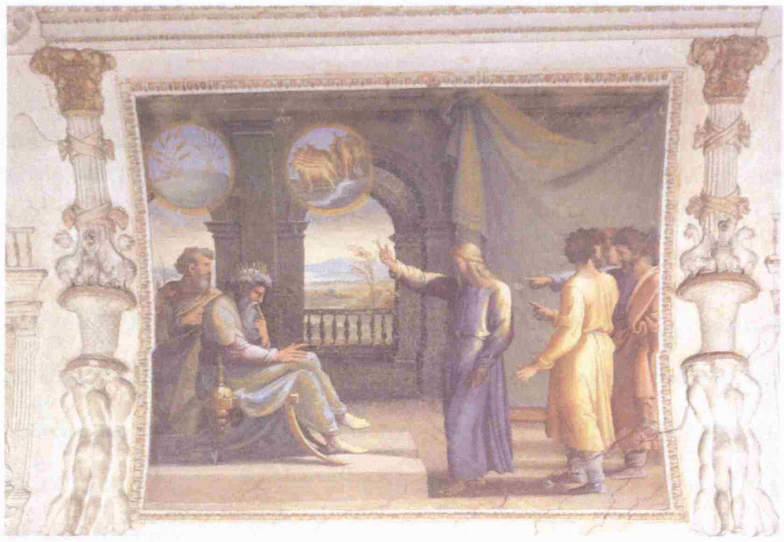

Figure 18 School of Raphael, *The Dream of Pharaoh*, from the Logge in the Vatican, *c.*1518-19

From Cornini et al 1993, p. 66

There are a number of lexicographical arguments that should be taken into account. Gunn first suggested in 1917 that *sphransh*, 'the "magicians" of Egypt whom Pharaoh called in to declare to him his dream of the kine and the ears of com' was 'beyond doubt a survival in a somewhat worn-down form of the term *sḫ pr-ʿnḫ*' (Gunn 1917, 252). Although Černý disputed this argument in 1964, suggesting that it derived from *sbȝ pr-ʿnḫ* (meaning 'teacher'), he implicitly reverted to Gunn's interpretation by 1976 where he gave the

derivation of *sphransh* as *sḫ pr-ʿnḫ*, with the meaning 'soothsayer' (Černý 1976, 169). Černý's earlier suggestion did not fit the context of pharaoh's dream particularly well, and required 'b' to be assimilated into 'p' while the genitive particle was omitted entirely, and on balance it seems less persuasive than Gunn's original view. The Greek and Hebrew terms also have a bearing on the relevance of this passage - in Greek, the term for the interpreters of dreams *(ἐξηγητής)* relates to the older tradition of oracles and dream interpretation, while in contemporary Roman Egypt it referred to an official administrative role (Bowman and Rathbone 1992; Kraut 1984). In Hebrew, the late Egyptian term *ḥry-tp* (and Demotic *ḥry-tb*) is phonetically rendered as *ḥarṭummîm*, and used to designate the magicians of pharaoh and of Babylon in the tales of Joseph, Moses, and Daniel (Ritner 1993, 221; Quaegebeur 1985, 162).

Returning to the incident involving dream interpreters in Genesis, the passage reads:

'And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the interpreters of dreams [scribes of the House of Life] of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.' (Gen. 41: 8, A V)

The act of translation from Greek into Coptic suggests two equally viable interpretations. In order to make the scene intelligible, the Bohairic translators selected 'scribes of the House of Life' as dream interpreters. Their translation reflects either the memory of an earlier period, or contemporary reality, and on a secondary level, makes reference either to royal or non-royal dreams.

This episode in Genesis has been used by anthropologists as the archetypal example of the 'message dream', an impersonal message from the gods where the king is essentially the agent (for a critique of the message dream being identified with Lincoln's 'culture pattern' dream, see Kilborne 1981). Although this is the first and only instance of the specific topos of a royal dream being interpreted by the House of Life, the event is entirely congruent with the function of the priests at Osorkon II's *sed*-festival and that of the magicians in the Setna cycle: close attendance on the king, and deployment of magical knowledge. Rather than emerging from 'a period when the House of Life as an

institution had long ceased to exist' (Gunn 1917, 252), it may indicate that the House of Life was still a present reality in the third century.

Lucchesi discovered a new Sahidic citation of the House of Life (#74) , from approximately the same period or slightly later, which supports this thesis. The passage occurs in one of the Hermetic discourses in Codex VI, a conversation between a teacher and pupil:

"O my son,
write this book for the temple at Diospolis
in hieroglyphic characters, entitling it 'The Eighth
Reveals the Ninth.'"
"I will do it, my <father>, as
you command
now." "O my <son>,
write the language of the book on steles
of turquoise. O my son,
it is proper to write this book
on steles of turquoise,
in hieroglyphic characters.
For Mind himself has
become overseer
of these. Therefore, I command
that this teaching be carved
on stone, and that you place it in
my sanctuary."

(Dirkse, Brashler and Parrott 1979, 367-9)

The phrase 'in hieroglyphic characters' is rendered 'en lettres (= caractères) de scribe de la Maison de *ʿnḫ*' (Lucchesi 1975, 255, citing Krause and Labib 1971, 181 [61, line 20]).

Lucchesi shows that this passage endorses the etymology of the *sphransh* in the Bohairic example discussed above: 'II est donc réjouissant de constater qu'un ancien texte, d'origine gnostique, tout en nous affermissant dans une première intuition qui se révèle positive, nous apporte contre toute attente l'équivalent saïdique d'une forme bohaïrique jusqu'ici isolée, à laquelle il viendra désormais s'ajouter dans nos dictionnaires' (1975, 256). To find the House of Life in a Gnostic context in the fourth century is also very interesting (compare Labib 1978).

That dream interpretation was an important aspect of life, even of mental health, in the late period and Graeco-Roman period is well-attested, for example by the manuals of interpretation found among the Tebtunis papyri, *P.Carlsberg* 13 and 14 verso (Volten 1942). If it was a specialization of the House of Life, it was not a monopoly. Hor, the priest of Thoth in the temple of Memphis (Ray 1976), and Ptolemaios, a recluse in the Serapeum, attempted their own dream interpretation, without mention of a manual,[37] but neither are known to be linked to a House of Life. Incubation is widely documented at various temples from the Late Period, carried out by priests; there is limited evidence for incubation in earlier periods (Szpakowska 2003, 65; 142-147). The act of Egyptian dream interpretation by its nature was a gradual process of sharing and disseminating knowledge. It would not have been difficult to become familiar with the interpretations of dreams in Qenherkhepshef's book, which is known to have passed through several people's hands at Deir el-Medina. Signs of this dissemination of knowledge may be seen in even earlier periods, such as the hints of the language of dream manuals evident in the dream simile in Sinuhe (Parkinson 2006).

2.2.8 Summary

Magic was clearly an important part of the knowledge maintained at the House of Life; magical acts were considered by the Egyptians as 'deeds of knowledge' (*sp rḫt*). There is evidence for 'masters of magic' operating there, written magic being used at state occasions or filtering out into daily life, spoken magic being used and taught, and of the way in which the knowledge of magic was enmeshed with the knowledge of religion and cult. Ritner has argued that 'the composition and preservation of magical incantations (as well as hymns, rituals, and even medical potions) was the prerogative of the 'House of Life' ... the sacred scriptorium attached to temples throughout the country' (1993, 204-5). While it is clear that the House of Life could and did generate written magic, the evidence

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[37] Ptolemaios' dream, 2 June 158 BC, in *UPZ* 77: 'What I saw in my dream, may it be well with me' (he sees Amun delivering a bull from a cow in labour); Ray 2006, 195. Ray however considers that Ptolemaios recorded the details of his dreams so that they could be interpreted by someone else, even though there is no reference to such a person in the documents (196).

is insufficient to maintain that it held the monopoly on doing so; there is a wide spectrum of magical activity in Egyptian life that cannot be attributed to this institution. Although Clement reported that 'Egypt is the mother of magicians' (Pinch 1994, 47), neither he nor any other observer stated that they were trained at or found in the House of Life.

2.3 Annals, History, Myth

'the annals of our — as you so often term her — efferfreshpainted livy, in beautific repose, upon the silence of the dead, from pharoph the nextfirst down to ramescheckles the last bust thing'

James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 1939, 452.18[38]

Formal records of the past are a type of knowledge that can be directly connected with the House of Life. The content of the records conveys what was considered worthwhile information to transmit, to 'copy out', as the texts sometimes say. The annals consisting of bare information such as king lists provided an official memory of the past, that finds its counterpart in other ways of remembering or forgetting the past that will be discussed in Section 3 (Biographies of the Tomb I) below. On a micro-level, the job of recording the past was sometimes passed down through families, fostering the accurate transmission of information through the added personal dimension of intergenerational traditions. Mythological annals were transmitted but constantly added to and synthesized, demonstrating a profoundly creative approach to the 'history' of the gods that is analogous to the use of the hieroglyphic script. Like the annals of Joyce's river Liffey, the annals of the gods maintained at the House of Life may look back at the past while reconfiguring it.

Table 7 Annals

Evidence No.	Short description of evidence	Category
#9	Amenwahsu	religion; **annals**
#10a	Didia, son of Amenwahsu	scribe
#10b	Ipu, son of Amenwahsu	scribe
#10c	Khaemope I, son of Amenwahsu	scribe; **annals**
#10d	Khaemope II, grandson of Amenwahsu	scribe; **annals**
#71	Ramesses II, Luxor	**annals** (records)
#14	Ramesses IV, Abydos	kingship, **annals**, associated gods; religion

[38] Joyce's treatment of Thoth in the *Wake* was based closely on the chapter entitled "Sculptures of Rameses III" in Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, as Troy (1976) has shown.

Evidence No.	Short description of evidence	Category
#15	Wadi Hammamat Yr 2	**annals**; associated gods; writing; kingship; knowledge
#43	Imhotep (Petearpokrates)	associated gods; **annals**

2.3.1 Transmission through the family: Amenwahsu and his male descendants

Amenwahsu is not only particularly well-documented himself, but situated within a family for whom there is considerable evidence relating to their rank and occupation; most significantly he stands at the head of a dynasty of participation in the House of Life. The body of evidence consists of inscriptions from his tomb, TT 111 at Sheikh 'Abd al-Qurna in Western Thebes, dating to the time of Ramesses II, and from three related stelae in Tübingen (471), Lausanne (3378) and the Louvre (C.210), the latter identified by Amer in his recent discussion of the group as belonging to a possible relative (Amer 2000, 1).

Amenwahsu held three key positions in the House of Life, presumably located at the Temple of Amun at Karnak; he was:

'scribe who copies out the annals of the gods and goddesses in the House of Life' (KRI, III, 305:7)

'scribe of the House of Life' (KRI, III, 303:9) ('of the Lord of the Two Lands' on the Lausanne stela 3378)

'scribe of Tracking in the House of Life' (KRI, III, 306:6), a difficult title, interpreted as one concerned with records of tracking necropolis routes by Amer.

The second title, that of 'scribe of the House of Life', occurs in a 'colophon' (as described by Kitchen 1980, III, 303:7) in the tomb, which is still unpublished. It states: 'This inscription was written in this tomb by the scribe of the House of Life Amenwahsu with

his own finger(s)' (Gardiner 1938*a*, 161), stressing his pride in his literacy, command of the hieroglyphic language, and compositional skills.

While identifying himself as a writer, Amenwahsu was also a 'Festival-leader of all the gods in their annual festivals', 'Guide of the Sacred Barque in peace, with glorification-spells on his lips', *wab*-priest of Sekhmet (cf. von Känel 1984, 45-51), and God's Father of Re-Atum. Amer suggested that the group of titles fell into a first set describing his scribal function and a second set describing his priestly calling. A final title, 'scribe of the sacred books in the House of Amun', again raises the question of connections between books in the House of Life and those in related temple locations such as the *pr-mḏ3t* (p. 54 above).

Four of Amenwahsu's male descendants followed him into the House of Life. Didia, Ipu and grandson Khaemope II all held the title 'scribe of the House of Life', while another son Khaemope I rose slightly higher to be not only a 'scribe of the House of Life' but also 'scribe of the sacred book(s) of the Lord of the Two Lands, who copies the annals of all the gods in the House of Life', as his father had done (Amer 2000, 2; Brunner-Traut 1981, 103). The whole family was undoubtedly from a scholarly, temple-orientated milieu - Amenwahsu's mother, one of his four daughters, and his daughter-in-law were Chantresses of Amun, his father was 'Chief Draughtsman of the Lord of the Two Lands in every monument of Amun in Karnak', and another son Ipu was a Temple scribe of Montu of Armant. Based on these facts, it seems the opportunity, although not the guarantee, of hereditary employment was available at the House of Life - not all Amenwahsu's male descendants found a place there, either through lack of desire or ability. Montet made the observation about priestly offices during the Ramesside period that 'it would nevertheless be a mistake to conclude from these texts that as soon as their holder died jobs which involved heavy responsibility, and required considerable ability for their satisfactory performance, were immediately given to his son' (Montet 1958, 254). It is therefore probable that the 19th Dynasty House of Life where Amenwahsu held office was a multipurpose enterprise - where copying of mythological annals took place, a place associated with the king, and a place where important practical geographic information was held. The generational ties of son following father into the *pr-ᶜnḫ*, and

other family members also working in the temple ambit, would have surely reinforced continuities of practice and the completion of projects.

Redford's conclusion, that 'the titles of such "scribes of holy writ" as Amenwahsu and his son Khaemope, show clearly that such works [stories about the gods of a quasi-annalistic nature] were written out, copied and (presumably) stored in the "House of Life", an institution connected, especially in the Late Period, with the temples' (Redford 1986, 225), necessitates a review of what is known about such 'mythological' annals.

Annals (*gnwt*) according to Redford, 'purported to be records of some kind, arranged by regnal year...by implication they encompass records of accession and coronation...*sd*-festivals...and temple foundation' (Redford 1986, 85). Where the annals of gods and goddesses are referred to, we are probably dealing with mythological records. Authorship of both these types of annals is usually ascribed to Thoth, less often Khonsu, a form of Horus, Sefkhet-abwy, Seshat, and Amun, while scribes like Amenwahsu and his son Khaemope supposedly copied them out. The technique of self-effacement is interesting, as is the probable euphemism of 'copied out' instead of edited, reworked, or composed from scratch.

A more personal view of the annals (*gnwt*) can be found up on the Khonsu temple roof at Karnak (Figure 19), where a prayer to the god asks him to:

'Cause [my] annals to endure in your temple
every day. I have provided
for your beloved place [during] every feast
for a long time past...'

Graffito No. 152, Block E4 (Jacquet-Gordon 2003, 57)

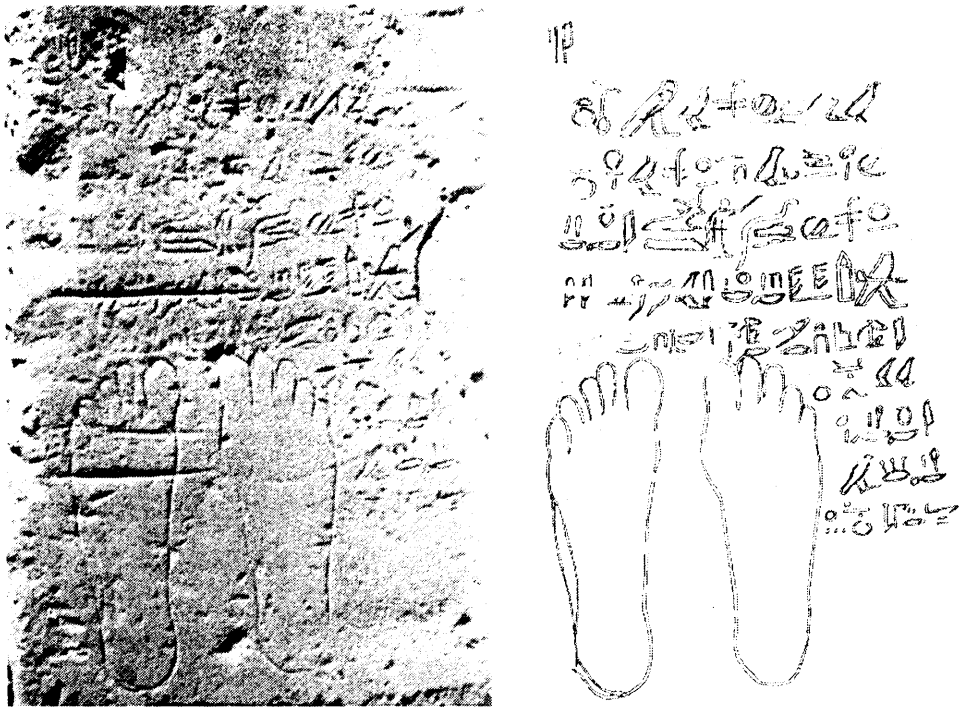

Figure 19 Late Period graffito on the roof of the temple of Khonsu: hieroglyphic inscription with footprints

From Jacquet-Gordon 2003, pl. 58

The inscription expresses a desire for the annals to last, and that the god Khonsu should oversee their preservation in return for years of supplying offerings. The writer, or the one whom the inscription is written for ('he says'), is the 'son of the opener of the doors of the shrine in the temple of Khonsu'. It is an interesting question to ask what is meant by 'my annals' – this personal record of footprints, or the annals of the gods?

As written reference works, *gnwt* are associated with the House of Books (Kitchen 1979, II, 275:9, where they are noted as 'secret annals'), and the House of Life (in the cases of Amenwahsu, Khaemope I, Ramesses II and Ramesses IV which are discussed below). Redford has discussed these annals from the point of view that they represented the 'historicization of a deity', encapsulating knowledge of their actions in myths that were then conserved by the priesthood. Power is derived from this knowledge, and he argues that this was a product of the intellectual environment of the literate world of the scribe: 'this strong inclination to view myth as part of history, in fact the history of the gods, on the same plane as the history of man... is not the temptation of the priestly celebrant, but

the scribal intellectual' (Redford 1986, xx). In addition to mythological annals, it is possible to view spells constructed around 'knowing' (e.g. 'Knowing the Manifestations of...') as reflections of the knowledge of events in the divine world and hence proto-annals (Redford 1986, 93). The process of placing divine events in a historical framework, often within cycles of myths, can be traced from the early Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom during which the evidence for these annals in the House of Life first appears.

2.3.2 Consulting the archives: Ramesses II and Ramesses IV

The investigations of Ramesses II in the 'archives' of the House of Life would seem to imply that he consulted these kinds of mythological annals. The reference comes from the Dedicatory Text of Year 3, inscribed on the east wall of the forecourt abutting onto the first pylon at Luxor Temple (Kitchen 1979, II, 346). Ramesses states his credentials, one 'learned like Thoth', fit to do research as he prepared to construct his monument (Kitchen 1999, 209). The inscription relates:

'Now His Majesty made a search in the library (*is n sšw*), he opened and read the books of the House of Life, and he learned the offering prescriptions of heaven and every secret of earth'

(Redford 1971, 113).

From these records, Ramesses discovered that Thebes was the site of the primeval mound, and that Thebes and Heliopolis could be identified with the right and left eyes of Re. On the basis of this exegesis the king announces his decision to build the forecourt, pylon and triple shrine on behalf of the god Amun. Thus mythological history is used to justify current policy, and the image of the scholar-king enquiring into the annals of the gods both enhances and feeds off the prestige of the institution that keeps this information.

On the longer of two inscriptions from Abydos on stelae discovered by Mariette, Ramesses IV's homage to Osiris furnishes another example of the king consulting the records in the House of Life. The stela (Cairo Museum, JE 48831) glorifies Osiris and

eleven other divinities; unfortunately the year is lost. Mariette noted that the stela was found not in the temple of Osiris itself, but in the middle of the central necropolis near the cemetery of the chantresses (Mariette 1880, 441). He suggested that it might have been located in a chapel dedicated to Osiris that did not survive. In the text, published by Mariette (1880), Piehl (1884) and in a fuller version by Korostovtsev (1946), Ramesses says:

I have reckoned in my heart my Father my Lord [in] [the] [annals?] of Thoth who is in the House of Life. I have not neglected any of them (as) disregarded, to seek out the great ones more than the small ones. I have found... amongst the entire Ennead and your forms, all of them all of them, are more mysterious than them.

(adapted translation of Korostovtsev 1946, and Peden 1994. Hornung understood the passage differently, and argued that Ramesses had studied the great gods more than the lesser ones, arguing for a ranking system of divinities; Hornung 1983, 231).

Figure 20 The stela of Ramesses IV, Cairo JE 48831

From Korostovtsev 1946, pl. I

The restoration of the word 'annals' has been adopted by a number of scholars (Gardiner 1938*a*; Korostovtsev 1946; Peden 1994), although no traces remain and the restoration is not beyond doubt. However, the context suggests that the king has consulted mythological records which are extremely likely to have been called 'annals' in the lacuna:

'... the days of which they speak, they are (long) past. Nut was not yet pregnant with your beauty; one (then) lived among the gods as (among) men, animals, and the wildlife of the waters likewise... This is in writing and not (just) oral tradition; the living calculate, to learn the day and the month, to add to one another, to learn of their lifespan'

(Peden 1994, 95).

As with the Year 4 stela (44876), a significant theme of the text is the concept of the king making a divine bargain, 'that in return for his munificence he should be rewarded with a lengthy reign and an assurance that his offspring will be regarded as the land's rightful heirs' (Peden 1994, 37). It seems on this occasion that he found the same kind of theological material, specifically formulated in a historical or annalistic framework, as did Ramesses II, and there may well be a conscious 'quoting' of the latter king's experience - the famous comparison of their reign lengths on the Year 4 stela lends support to the idea of conscious emulation. The theme of family legitimation and administrative continuity in the inscription has been identified convincingly by Derchain, who argued that 'la stèle est le plaidoyer de celui qui se pretend l'héritier légitime et qui en appelle pour cela à une théorie de la souveraineté et de la légitimité qu'il exprime à sa maniere, c'est-à-dire, à l'aide de mythes et d'allusions à des cultes bien établis' (Derchain 1980, 14). Beyond the usual royal need to assert legitimacy, this stela may reflect a higher level of anxiety or insecurity created by the assassination attempt on Ramesses III.

Ramesses IV consulted the annals of the House of Life for a very different purpose in Year 2 of his reign, according to the rock stela in the Wadi Hammamat (#15, Table 1; Kitchen, RI, VI, 9-11; Couyat and Montet 1912, 112-113, §240). The inscription informs us:

> Now as for this good god, the one who is brilliant in intelligence like Thoth, he entered into the annals like the Creator and he viewed the writings of the House of Life. His divine heart closely examined the benefactions for the Lord of the Gods and his heart devised successful deeds, like Horus, which Re has repeated to him, in his heart, so that he might uncover what was right, this monument enduring forever...
>
> (trans. Peden 1994, 85).

The result of this consultation of the annals is that the king gives orders to a group of senior court and temple officials (including the 'scribes and learned men of the House of Life', although this is a partial restoration), 'to make this monument for the Place of Eternity, in this mountain of Bekhen' (Breasted 1906, 223; 'Bekhen', *bḫn*, refers to siltstone-greywacke; Nicholson and Shaw 2000, 58).

This raises questions about the content and nature of the 'annals' consulted, and about whether this is more than a formal circumnambulation or courtly phraseology for the initiation of quarrying work. Goyon believed that the House of Life 'contenaient des informations sur la montagne de bekhen, c'est-à-dire le rapport de la précédente expedition, le rapport de Usimara-Nakhte' (Goyon 1957, 25). The 'annals' would therefore include archive material about royal activities, with sufficient practical information about geology, geography and expedition planning, to be of use at a later date, possibly in the form of a report. The nature of the practical knowledge Ramesses IV drew on in the House of Life can be further defined with the help of a second rock inscription from the Wadi Hammamat, which it is convenient to discuss in relation to annals.

2.3.3 Choosing stone, finding routes: Ramesses IV's Year 3 expedition

In Year 3 a major expedition was despatched to quarry bekhen-stone for the 'Place of Truth' (the usual term for the Valley of the Kings), with approximately 9000 men under the command of the high priest of Amun, Ramessesnakhte (Couyat and Montet 1912, 37, §12). The expedition proper was preceded by an advance party:

'the Scribe of the House of Life, Ramesses-Ashahebsed; the Scribe of the Temples (?) Hori, the Priest of the temple of Min, Horus and Isis in Coptos, Usimarenakht'

who were commanded 'to seek out the materials for the Place of Truth, in the mountain of Bekhen-stone, when it was discovered that they were of extremely good quality, being (truly) great monuments to marvel at' (Peden 1994, 88).

Gardiner argued that this advance party did not actually go to the Wadi Hammamat, and that instead they 'had the double function first to seek out for examination whatever monuments of Hammamat-stone were available in Thebes or other cities, and secondly, guided by what they learnt from these, to devise the new monuments to be quarried there on behalf of Ramesses' (Gardiner 1938*a*, 163). This seems an unnecessarily convoluted interpretation of the passage, and the conclusion in Christophe's detailed study (1949) of

the Year 3 expedition, that this small group was despatched to the actual quarries, is more convincing. Christophe justifies the choice of the members of the party by speculating about the contents of the temple archives:

> Il est certain que nous ne connaîtrons jamais certains aspects de la mentalité des Égyptiens. Il est permis toutefois de tenter de nous représenter leurs réactions en face des problèmes de l'existence courante: comment choisissait-on par exemple un bloc de pierre *bḫn* pour les constructions funéraires royales? Couleur, grain de la pierre, forme du bloc, dimensions du monument, tout cela était noté depuis des siècles dans les archives. Choisir, c'était un acte religieux qui s'accompagnait peut-être de cérémonies rituelles dont la description était soigneusement relatée sur papyrus. Qui, mieux qu'un scribe de la Maison-de-Vie, avait accés aux ouvrages de religion?
>
> (Christophe 1949, 17).

This interpretation seems to synthesize the notion of technical, practical information, and knowledge of ritual, ceremonious behaviour, held simultaneously by the scribes of the House of Life.

Figure 21 Detail of the Turin Papyrus Map showing an upside down tree in the wadi

The upside down tree is directly opposite from the bekhen-stone quarry, which is shown as a greenish oval embedded within the brownish black hillside. Fragment H. From Harrell 2007.

One associated document, the Turin Papyrus Map, may relate to the issue of the involvement of the House of Life in the quarrying expeditions of Ramesses IV. The map

(Turin Papyri 1879, 1899, and 1969) illustrates the region of Wadi Hammamat, and is widely accepted to date from the reign of Ramesses IV. It appears to be concerned with the quarrying of bekhen-stone, and may have specifically been 'made as a record of one of his quarrying expeditions for bekhen-stone in Wadi Hammamat' 37 (Harrell and Brown 1992, 88). It is less likely that the purpose of the map was in order to assist the expedition: 'once in Wadi Hammamat there is no possibility of getting lost and a map would not be needed to find one's way around' (Harrell and Brown 1992, 104).

The map has a direct connection with House of Life, because it was drawn up by Amennakht, son of Ipuy, (see p. 47 above). There is therefore the possibility that this kind of map may have formed part of the records of the House of Life, periodically consulted by the king or his officials when organizing a major expedition. It is also worth recalling Amenwahsu's title, 'scribe of Tracking in the House of Life', when considering the possibility that topographic information was stored at the House of Life.

Visual records of the geography of Egypt other than the Turin map have not survived. If this seems surprising or frustrating, Sundwall has observed 'There is no evidence that the ancients used maps as we do, or that their conception of geography depended on them as ours does today' (1996, 619).

2.3.4 Annals in the Ptolemaic period: Imhotep, son of Petearpokrates

The evidence for this son and father comes from a stela in the Louvre and another in Vienna, dating to the Ptolemaic period (Louvre C 232, in Pierret 1878, 21; Vienna, Wreszinski 1906, I 25 No. 150). Imhotep forms a useful point of contrast with Amenwahsu, who lived about one thousand years earlier, in terms of their characterization of the functions of the House of Life. Imhotep's titles on both stelae include: 'royal scribe, prophet [*ḥm-nṯr*] of Thoth-dwelling-in-the-House-of-Life' (Pierret 1878, 21; Wreszinski 1906, 89).

The Louvre stela dedicated to his father Petearpokrates continues with an invocation:

'O all you priests who penetrate into the words of god and are skilled in writings, you who are enlightened in the House of Life and have discovered the ways of the gods, who have penetrated the archives of the Library and can interpret the mysteries of the emanations of Re, who are skilled in the works of the Ancestors and who open up the heart of what is upon the wall, you who carve the tombs and who interpret the mysteries...' (Gardiner 1938*a*, 173).

The association with Thoth has already been noted in the Wadi Hammamat inscription of Ramesses IV (#14 above). Thoth is the most frequently mentioned tutelary god of the House of Life, and the most closely associated with annals. What is interesting about Imhotep's inscription is that it makes an explicit connection between the divine author of the annals, and those who can read, master and interpret them, describing the hermeneutic circle. Although the 'words of the god' occupy an oral, performative sphere, they are also recorded in writing in the library, and on the temple walls, presumably in texts and scenes.

The general implication of the texts that refer to the House of Life is that any creative writing, whether of annals or magical works, taking place there is performed by a god, usually Thoth, sometimes in association with Horus in *Šnwt*. The latter god is cited in a Ramesside papyrus, *P. Leiden* 347, where he is described as 'master of words, of exalted rank in the House of Life, a creator in the library' and 'prince of books'; a third passage reveals him cooperating with Thoth in the authorship of a magical work (Gardiner 1938*a*, 164). The staff of the House of Life are positioned as interpreters or scholarly middlemen, but it is clearly they who wrote the 'works of the Ancestors' and the 'emanations of Re'. It is interesting is to ask whether they were interpreting a fossilized corpus of words and texts, or whether they were adding, editing and developing, and if so until what date. Manetho had access to annals, but whether from a temple library or the House of Life is unknown.

Finally, references to Thoth in the Ptolemaic period connected with the House of Life, should be considered alongside the contemporary reconceptualization of Hermes in the Greek community, during his slow evolution from syncretistic god to eventual formation as Hermes Trismegistus in the Roman period. Fowden has pointed out that if the Hermes of the Greek magical papyri 'succeeded in becoming a dynamic element in Graeco-Egyptian popular religion, it was largely thanks to his alliance with his native counterpart

[Thoth], which allowed him to be thought of as more Egyptian than Greek' (Fowden 1986, 26).

2.3.5 Summary

Gnwt are attested from the Old Kingdom, referring to records of the major events of each year and the height of the inundation; it is not until the New Kingdom that they are found directly connected with the House of Life, although it is possible they were composed and kept in that institution prior to this date. In the New Kingdom there is evidence for mythological annals, sacred records of earlier times probably referring to the gods, being copied in the House of Life. In addition, there is evidence for the king consulting the records in the House of Life when preparing for two major quarrying expeditions; other examples are known of the practice of consulting the *gnwt* in an unnamed location, 'but only in an effort to seek guidance in a time of crisis' (Redford 1986, 84). From the Ptolemaic period the evidence from Imhotep's stelae suggests that the written records of the gods, were still studied and investigated and that Thoth was considered to reside in the House of Life.

These scattered references to the annals suggest that certain categories of material were retained in some form of archive, already being 'copied out' in the New Kingdom, if we are to take this claim at face-value rather than to understand it as a description of creative writing more than an act of faithful transmission of a text. In addition to the transmission of a form of historical consciousness suggested by the maintenance of written annals, hints of geographical intelligence, which may have been oral rather than written, are also present.

2.4 Prevention of harm, preservation of health and the House of Life

Medical knowledge and practice in Egypt have traditionally been approached via the study of titles of physicians, the pathology of human remains, and the philological analysis of 'medical papyri', until recently signifying only those such as *P. Ebers* and *P. Edwin Smith* that concentrate on diagnosis and prescription (e.g. Grapow 1954-73; Westendorf 1999). Iconographical evidence has not been much used, with the problems of ambiguity of interpretation, and the narrow definition of medical instruments, standing in the way (cf Figure 22 below). The phrase 'texts for health' has come to be used as a more inclusive category, bringing incantation texts into the evidence base, the reason for the change perhaps being that 'by using the loaded term "medicine", we are falling into the trap of suggesting that it was rational, familiar and "just like ours"'(Carr 2002, 59).

Figure 22 Relief from Kom Ombo of 'surgical instruments', late 2nd c AD [39]

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[39] Evaluation of the instruments is situated within a debate on cultural identity, and whether they reflect Roman 'domination' or native conservatism. The analogy Ritner uses is telling: 'Current American surgeons do not cease to practice American medicine simply because they use a German scalpel' (2000, 119). See also Nunn 1995, 163-4.

The full implications of ethnomedical approaches are only beginning to appear in the literature, with mental health addressed as part of the concept of 'health' (Jeffreys and Tait 2000), and the evidential biases for non-elite health problematised (Hebron 2005).

The use of herbal medicine, temporarily divorced from orthodox western medical practice between the eighteenth and twentieth century,[40] is now taken seriously again in terms of its efficacy rather than purely historical interest (see Froschauer and Römer, 2007), and the transmission of some herbal knowledge from dynastic Egypt, into Coptic and then Islamic Egypt, broadly acknowledged (Till 1951; Betro 1988; Manniche 1989, 7). This has been couched in terms of two traditions, the now familiar 'folk' and 'learned', somehow combined by Arab medical writers in their treatises, composed in the libraries of Baghdad and Damascus; thus Manniche (1989) writes in a general work on herbalism:

> In the Middle Ages, when Islamic science was at its height, the use of herbs in medicine was subject of major treatises for which the Arabs were justly famous. They in turn had extracted their information from the learned books of their earlier Greek counterparts, to which was added the knowledge of local plants which had been used in folk medicine for centuries. The herbal tradition was kept alive by the Copts, early Christians who were direct descendants of the ancient Egyptians (1989, 7).

Claims that the House of Life was the centre of medical training and knowledge may be overstated, it will be argued here.[41] With the medical personnel themselves, whether narrowly defined just as those holding the title *swnw*, or including the *ḫrp srḳt*, and *wʿb sḫmt* (von Känel 1984), it is notable how *few* make reference to any kind of connection with the institution.[42] While the 'medical papyri' cannot be directly linked to the *pr-ʿnḫ*,

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[40] See Coulter 1975-1994. Contemporary herbalism is being legitimized, or re-branded, via clinical trials: 'By applying the rules of science, traditional herbalism is being transformed into science-based phytomedicine' (Ernst 2000, Preface). This perspective, which demonstrates a need to transform folk medicine, has had a subtle but important influence over the literature on ancient pharmacology.

[41] I would suggest that this claim becomes fixed in the literature following the publication of Ghalioungui's major study published in 1973, *The House of Life: Magic and Medical Science in Ancient Egypt* (Amsterdam: B M Israel, a retitled edition of *Magic and Medical Science* published in 1963 by Hodder and Stoughton), even though the author took a fairly cautious position on the House of Life.

[42] For a recent discussion of the problems of defining medical titles, see Zucconi 2007.

either on a lexical basis or in terms of their archaeological context (where known),[43] there are nevertheless strong indications that they are the product of lengthy transmission (Robins 1994-5; Ritner 2000), raising the question of how that transmission occurred.

2.4.1 Self-medication: medicine outside the House of Life

The Metternich Stela (Figure 23 below),[44] covered in images and texts relating to snakebites and scorpion stings, was set up in a temple at Heliopolis; the stela is representative of the self-medicating aspect of Egyptian healing, where the supplicant activated the healing power of the deities shown or mentioned on the stela by pouring water over it, drinking it, and thereby activating the cure (Satzinger 1987; Allen 2005, 49-62).

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[43] Many of the medical papyri are unprovenanced (Edwin Smith Papyrus and Ebers Papyrus, bought in Luxor in 1862; the Kahun Medical Papyrus was found somewhere in the town of Lahun, probably in a large elite house among waste-paper including accounts and letters).
[44] Now in the Metropolitan, the stela dates to the reign of Nectanebo II (360–343 B.C.); Fletcher Fund, 1950 (50.85). For over two thousand years, the stela was missing until it was discovered in a wall that was excavated in a Franciscan monastery. The stela was then presented to Prince Metternich in 1828 by Muhammad 'Ali Pasha before being finally donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 23 Unmediated access to medicine outside the House of Life: the Metternich Stela

Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1950 (50.85)

The many examples of Horus stelae/*cippi* show the same process at work (Figure 24 below); most are 'independent, self-contained amulets' (Seele 1947, 43) as opposed to the few examples which are associated with larger monuments such as temples. The small *cippi* are often uninscribed with personal names, and it has been suggested that they were manufactured to be sold to individuals as a form of private insurance, or that they were part of a world of personal piety (Seele 49; Helck and Otto 1999, 128; cf Sternberg-el-Hotabi 1999). Royal statues could also be mobilized for medical purposes, even placed far out on a desert road. From the late Ramesside period, there is a statue of king Ramesses III, found on the desert road from the city of the Heliopolis (Cairo JE 69771), with some of the same group of incantations as on the Horus stelae (Drioton 1939). The

statue of Ramesses III acted both as a reference to the power of the ruler, and as an emergency first-aid depot (compare Darnell 2002, 113). Horus *cippi* were easily miniaturized, in the form of amulets, warding off snakes and scorpions or instantly to hand in an emergency. The idea that these amulets are forms of treatment as well as acting as protection has recently gained currency (see Allen on the anhydrite *cippus* amulet at the Met, 57.143: 'In the event of a mishap, it could also be immersed in water to provide an immediate antivenom'; 2005, 64). This continuum of prophylactic images of Horus is known principally from the Late Period, but the use of prophylactic amulets stretches back to the Old Kingdom and demonstrates that individuals could possess protective, or curative, objects, which they might wear on the body in life as well as after death. The ubiquity of prophylactic and curative amulets directly contradicts the image of medical knowledge as an exclusive domain of ritual experts.

Figure 24 Horus on the crocodiles, OIM 16881, obverse and reverse

From Seele 1947, pl. I

Dans l'antiquité pharaonique ces deux occupations [celui du médicin et celui du prêtre], ainsi que celle du sorcier, se touchaient et même se confondaient... (Posener 1936, 24)

Table 8 Medicine and the House of Life

Evidence No.	Short description of evidence	Category
#6	Keku/Imeny	**medicine**; scribe
#13	Harim conspiracy: 3/4 conspirators associated with the *pr-ᶜnḫ*; Iyroy, *wab*-priest of Sekhmet	associated gods; kingship; power/politics; scribes; **medicine**
#27	Peftjau-herawy-Nit	**medicine**; associated gods
#1	Udjahorresnet	**medicine**; kingship; politics
#32	Bentresh stela	**medicine**; magic
#61a	*P. Cairo* 58027, myrrh-keeper in the *pr-ᶜnḫ*	**medicine**; magic
#61b	*P. Cairo* 58027, great m. ointment	**medicine**; magic

It has been argued by a number of scholars, notably Gardiner (1938*a*), Ghalioungui (1973, 1983), Habachi and Ghalioungui (1971) and Weeks (1995), that the House of Life functioned as either a medical training centre, or a centre of medical knowledge. One might well expect elements of medical knowledge to be formally transmitted or recorded in some stable environment. The direct evidence for claims that the House of Life provided such an environment comes from the following cases.

2.4.2 A Middle Kingdom *swnw*: Keku/Imeny

The Middle Kingdom stela of Ankhef from the northern necropolis at Abydos provides the earliest example of a doctor directly associated with the House of Life. His name was either Keku or Imeny, and the stela in question is now in the Cairo Museum (CG 20023; Lange and Schäfer 1902). Among the fourteen individuals depicted on the back of the stela, one figure is designated as *sš pr-ᶜnḫ kkw* in a short vertical inscription, while above him another inscription reads *sꜣ imny swnw* (according to Dawakhly's reading; 1963-4, 95). The disposition and reading of these inscriptions has given rise to varying interpretations of how many individuals are described, and what their roles were. Lange and Schäfer (1902, 26) Gardiner (1938*a*, 160), and Jonckheere (1958, 22) believed that

the horizontal inscription read *wr swnw imny*, 'the chief physician Imeny', while the vertical inscription referred to another individual, *sš pr-ᶜnḫ kkw*, 'the scribe of the House of Life Keku', who was not shown for reasons of space. However Ghalioungui (1983, 23-24) has convincingly synthesized the arguments of Dawakhly, Kuentz and Daumas to show that the *wr* sign is more likely to be a *sꜣ* sign, and that it is unreasonable to assume that either title refers to an individual who is not depicted (making Imeny, or Keku, the exception among the fourteen people on this face of the stela). He suggests that the text could be translated in one of two ways:

'The scribe of the House of Life Kkw son of Imny the physician'

'The scribe of the House of Life, Kkw's son, the physician Imny'

(the second translation being 'in accordance with 12th-13th dynasty usage', although the first version is preferred; Ghalioungui 24).

Keku is also noteworthy because he bears the earliest example of the simple title *sš pr-ᶜnḫ* (Ward 1982, 160). An interesting comparison of the dual functions of doctor and scribe in the Middle Kingdom is found in the tomb of Nakht at Beni Hasan, where the owner is described as *sš swnw* - either 'scribe and physician' or 'scribe of the physician' (Ghalioungui 1983, 25). Literacy is a constant feature of the House of Life, but not an essential requirement of medical knowledge or practice; Ghalioungui implied that this suggested a covert hierarchy, noting that 'why some physicians mentioned that they were 'scribes' (*sš*), while many did not, raises the question of whether they wished to distinguish themselves from illiterate colleagues' (1983, 8). It may even be that Keku's two distinguishing life roles, doctor and scribe of the House of Life, should be considered as parallel rather than intersecting activities in this period.

2.4.3 A troublesome priest in the Twentieth Dynasty: Iyroy

The title of *wab*-priest of Sekhmet has also been associated with medicine in the House of Life by various scholars, who have argued that the *wab*-priests of Sekhmet practiced

medicine and veterinary surgery, following Lefebvre's citation of the passage in *P. Ebers*: '... as to any physician, any Sekhmet priest, any magician who applies the hand or the fingers... he may notice something in the heart...' (Lefebvre 1952, 57; von Känel 1984, 294-98). The recent publication of the hieratic manual of the 'pure priest of Sekhmet' from Tebtunis (Osing and Rosati 1998), whose duties included inspections for disease among people and livestock, further endorses his medical knowledge in the 1st-2nd c AD.

Habachi and Ghalioungui asserted that there was a House of Life at Bubastis, and that a centre for teaching medicine to *wab*-priests of Sekhmet was attached to it (1971, 69). The connection partly springs from the evidence from a door lintel, found in Qantir, belonging to Iyroy, who is better known as 'the great criminal Iyroy' from the harim conspiracy against Ramesses III. Iyroy is associated with the House of Life on the inscribed doorway, which gives his title chief *wab*-priest of Sekhmet as in the Turin Juridical Papyrus (in the second list of the accused; De Buck 1937, 156). Ghalioungui gave examples of six priests of Sekhmet who were also *swnw* (physicians), and argued the case for an equivalence between the two roles. Ritner however understood this role to depend more on magical knowledge in healing: 'Iyroy held authority in the House of Life affiliated with the Bubastite temple of Sakhmet ... in such a capacity he would have had easy access to hostile spells' (Ritner 1993, 213). Drawing together these various threads, it is possible that during the Ramesside period there was a degree of medico-magical expertise in Bubastis at the temple of Sakhmet; after Iyroy's political mistake and 'suicide', this centre may not have been in a position to receive royal approval, but the subtleties of the harim conspiracy are too opaque to allow further speculation. Does this mean that Ramesses IV's consultation of the *pr-ᶜnḫ* in relation to the annals and the Wadi Hammamat expedition is surprising (Section 2.3.2, p. 85 above), or should it be interpreted as the king's urgent reassertion of control of this institution?

2.4.4 Chief of physicians, Peftjau-herawy-Nit

The high-ranking official Peftjau-herawy-Nit (*Pᶜy.f-ṯᶜw-(ḥr)ᶜ.wi Ni.t,* #27, Table 1) is documented on four objects which date to the reign of Apries (589-570 BC) and his successor Amasis (570-526 BC), the most relevant of which is a statue in the Louvre

(A 93).[45] Since Gardiner discussed the Louvre statue in 1938, another statue has come to light, in the Mit Rahina storehouse (No 545; Bakry 1970). Peftjau-herawy-Nit's three statues all have the title 'chief of physicians'. Ghalioungui and Posener preferred this translation of *wr swnw* to more elaborate interpretations put forward by Gauthier (Ghalioungui 1983, 39; Posener 1936, 4; Gauthier 1922), who suggested that this was a title held specially by the High Priests of Sais and Bubastis.

Peftjau-herawy-Nit's associations with medicine are beyond doubt. It is the combination of other titles, and his role in the House of Life, that render this individual particularly interesting. Combining the information on the three statues and the offering table in the mosque of Baybars in Cairo, the titles state that Peftjau-herawy-Nit was Chief of the physicians of the South and the North (*wr swnw šmᶜ mḥw*); overseer of the treasury (*imy-r pr-ḥḏ*); great overseer of the House (ᶜ*ȝ n pr*), chief of bureau (ᶜ*ȝ n ḫ*), and hereditary prince (*rpᶜ.t ḥᶜty-*ᶜ). It should be noted that he holds *no* specific rank or title in the House of Life; nor did his politically prominent son, Wahibre (Gauthier 1922). Allowing for the fact that some of these titles may represent sequential moves in his career, and that some are reflective of hereditary rank, Peftjau-herawy-Nit nonetheless seems to have combined high administrative office with a senior rank in the medical profession. Other monuments belonging to his family, according to the genealogical reconstruction by Bakry, who published the Mit Rahina statue, indicate that he was born in Sais and that he was closely affiliated with its tutelary goddess Neith (Bakry 1970, 329; Peftjau-herawy-Nit's name can be translated as 'his breath is in the hands of Neith'). The other activity specifically mentioned in the texts is his work at Abydos. On the Louvre statue, the text relates that:

'I built the temple of the First of the Westerners, with great eternal works according to His Majesty's order, he saw my enthusiasm about the affairs of Abydos. I surrounded it with walls of brick... I erected the wepeg-sanctuary; I established its altars, and I dug its pool bordered with trees... I restored the House of Life and it was in a poor state... I made a boat of cedar wood (?). I protected Abydos for its lord and protected its people ... His Majesty praised me for what I had done' (Bakry 1970, 329).

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[45] The four objects are: the Louvre statue, A 93, the British Museum statue, EA 805, the statue in the Mit-Rahinah storehouse, numbered 545, and the offering-table found in the mosque of Baybars.

Probably at the king's behest, Peftjau-herawy-Nit undertook major architectural works at the Temple of Osiris in Abydos, including a restoration of the House of Life. Several questions arise as to whether this was the same kind of reorganization as that carried out by Udjahorresnet (#1, Table 1; see below); was it just a matter of building works,[46] or did it involve restructuring the staff of the House of Life, and most importantly, does Peftjau-herawy-Nit's role as 'chief of physicians' indicate that medical activity was a major feature of the Abydos House of Life?

While there may be an element of conventional rhetorical self-aggrandizement in Peftjau-herawy-Nit's biography, he lived during a period of political change (the transition from the rule of Apries to Amasis), which would have brought pressure to bear on even the most stable of institutions. These biographical texts finally give absolute clarity on the existence of a House of Life at Abydos, which seems to date back at least to the Middle Kingdom, and as will be seen, appears again in a much later source from the 3rd-4th c BC (#33, Table 1; Section 2.2.4 below). They add to the circumstantial evidence of a medical role for the institution, while underscoring the latter's vulnerability.

2.4.5 Reviving all that are sick: Udjahorresnet

Udjahorresnet has been widely discussed as paradigmatic of the Egyptian response to foreign domination, in this case during the Persian period (Posener 1936; Otto 1954; Lloyd 1982; Trigger 1983). The details of his life are known principally from a statue now in the Vatican (Vatican collections 196), previously in the collection of the emperor Hadrian at Tivoli (Figure 25); there is also his tomb which was discovered at Abusir in 1988-9 (Verner 1989), and a fourth-century statue found at Mit-Rahinah (Anthes et al 1965). The Vatican statue dates from regnal year 3 of Darius, i.e. 519 BC, and the texts are distributed over the body of Udjahorresnet and the naos he holds, giving rise to differing theories about the order in which they should be read (Posener 1936; Baines 1996). It is

[46] See Arnold 1999, 87, for the rebuilding of the Khentimentiu/Osiris temple at Abydos under Amasis's reign.

Figure 25 Naophorous statue of Udjahorresnet, in three phases of restoration

Vatican Collections 196; from Tulli 1941, figs 1, 4, 15

In the earlier years of Udjahorresnet's career, he was assigned the office *wr swnw*, chief [of] physicians, by Cambyses: 'he made me live at his side as companion and administrator of the palace' (Lichtheim 1980, 37). Ghalioungui has suggested that rather than 'Chief Physician', Udjahorresnet may well have been 'Chief of Physicians', which would account for the title *wr swnw* being given to him in mid-career (Ghalioungui 1983, 84).

Besides the many priestly titles Udjahorresnet held, he was commander of the royal navy under Amasis and Psammetichus III, companion and administrator of the palace, and was responsible for cleansing and restoring the temple of Neith at Sais under Cambyses. This event is the focus of the inscription under the left arm of the statue, continuing on the left and right of the naos base, and seems to have represented a pivotal moment in

Udjahorresnet's life. Although it is framed in terms of traditional Egyptian discourse about setting order in place of chaos, and stressing the positive aspects of his ability to achieve concessions from a foreign ruler, it purports to describe a historical event relating to the House of Life.

In the text inscribed on the dorsal pillar, Udjahorresnet describes how king Darius sent him back to Egypt:

'to restore the department[s] of the House[s] of Life...after (they had fallen into) decay. The foreigners carried me from land to land and delivered me back into Egypt according as the Lord of the Two Lands had commanded. I did as His Majesty commanded me; I furnished them with all their staffs consisting of persons of rank, not a poor man's son among them. I placed them in the charge of every learned man [in order to teach them?] all their crafts. His Majesty commanded them to be given all (manner of) good things in order that they might exercise all their craft(s). I equipped them with all their ability and all their apparatus which was on record in accordance with their former condition. This His Majesty did because he knew the virtue of this art to revive all that are sick and to commemorate for ever the name(s) of all the gods, their temples, their offerings and the conduct of their festivals'

(Gardiner 1938*a*, 157-8).

It is worthwhile comparing Posener's translation of the same passage, as it differs in his reading of *ṯt*, which Gardiner renders 'staffs', where Posener read *mḏ3tyw* and translated 'étudiants':

'Je fis selon ce que Sa Majesté m'avait ordonné. Je les ai pourvus de tous leurs étudiants qui étaient des fils de personnes de qualité, sans qu'il y ait des fils de petites gens. Je les ai placés sous la direction de tout savant ..... tous leurs travaux. Sa Majesté ordonna de leur donner toutes les bonnes choses afin qu'ils pussent faire tous leurs travaux. (En conséquence) je les ai dotés de toutes leurs choses utiles et de tous leurs accessoires indiqués par les écrits, comme il en était auparavant.

Sa Majesté a fait cela, parce qu'elle connaissait l'utilité de cet art pour faire vivre tout malade et pour faire durer le nom de tous les dieux, leurs temples, les revenus de leurs biens wakf et la conduite de leurs fêtes, éternellement.'

(Posener 1936, 22).

Posener argued that as a doctor himself, Udjahorresnet was particularly interested in the teaching of medicine, and that although the location of the House of Life is not specified

in the text it is very likely to be Sais. Furthermore, 'ces études occupaient une place spéciale dans le *pr-ᶜnḫ* qu'il vint restaurer' (Posener 1936, 24). Three suppositions are intermingled - that Udjahorresnet was actively involved with medicine, that it was his particular medical interest and expertise that made him an appropriate vehicle for Darius's strategy regarding the House of Life (extrapolating from the earlier evidence of Peftjau-herawy-Nit), and that medical education was a central function of the House of Life (hence the translation 'étudiants'). Gardiner however felt that the latter translation was 'without justification' (1938*a*, 157 n. 3), although his lengthy argument in favour of the reading *tt* is not entirely convincing, and one could equally choose to read it *mḏ3tyw* and translate it simply as 'bookmen'.

These suppositions have had a direct effect on the current appearance of the statue itself - Tulli describes how the 1930s restoration of the head was intended to show 'la gravita di un sacerdote unisce la lunga esperienza di un vecchio lupo di mare, comandante della flotta sotto Amasis e sotto Psammetek III', whose expression conveys how 'la lunga pratica medica... in mezzo ai malati aveva conferito un'abituale osservazione riflessiva, che meglio si direbbe esperienza, in quella "Casa del Vivere", a lui sì cara e della quale era stato sagace restauratore' (Tulli 1941, 226-7). The problem with these ideas centres on the fact that the text does not specify the existence of physicians in the House of Life, and thus Udjahorresnet's title of Chief of Physicians may be a red herring; instead, it could be argued that the 'art' of reviving the sick referred to the use of spells and other written works of magical protection. In addition, the restoration of the temple of Neith and that of the House of Life may be seen as administrative restructurings that called on Udjahorresnet's diplomatic and political skills rather than his experience as a doctor.

2.4.6 Mental illness? – 'an enemy with whom one cannot fight'

The 'Bentresh stela' (Louvre C 284) alludes to medicine in the House of Life on the basis of context and circumstantial evidence - the word 'physician' is not used in the text. Clagett surmised 'No doubt allied with the physician were those simply called "savants" (*rḫw* or *rḫw-ḫt*), and sometimes they were surely the same person' (Clagett 1989, 20). The stela was found in the ruins of a Graeco-Roman period building near the Khons

temple at Karnak, although the text may have been composed in the Late Period (Tait 1995, 178). Its content has been interpreted as a later priestly forgery, telling a pseudo-historical story of the divine intervention of the god Khons, with the propagandistic aim of enhancing the prestige and power of this god and by extension the priesthood responsible for his cult. For this reason it has often been compared with the Famine Stela (#31) on Sehel island, which dates to the Ptolemaic period while purporting to be a royal decree of the Third Dynasty (Barguet 1953). The Famine Stela also involves the House of Life (Gardiner 1938*a*, 166; 1938*b*, 83), although not in a medical role.

Figure 26 The Bentresh Stela

From Reinisch 1873, pl.12

The Bentresh stela describes how the Prince of Bakhtan asked Ramesses II to send help to cure his ill daughter, Bentresh, the younger sister of Ramesses' wife Nefrure. The text relates how the messenger of the prince of Bakhtan, probably Bactria, informs Ramesses that a malady (*mnt*) has seized Bentresh, and asks Ramesses:

> '"May your majesty send a learned man to see her!" His majesty said: "Bring me the personnel of the House of Life and the council of the residence." They were ushered in to him immediately. His majesty said: "You have been summoned in order to hear this matter: bring me one wise of heart with fingers skilled in writing from among you." Then the royal scribe Thothemheb came before his majesty, and his majesty ordered him to proceed to Bakhtan with the messenger'
>
> (Lichtheim 1980, 91).

Thothemheb's name, meaning 'Thoth-is-in-festival', may indicate that this is an emblematic character in a quasi-literary narrative, although Ghalioungui suggested a possible identification with a historical figure of the same name who was 'in charge of sacred writings' under Ramesses II (Ghalioungui 1983, 79). Thothemheb travels to Bakhtan but cannot manage on his own - the spirit possessing Bentresh he finds to be 'an enemy with whom one cannot fight' (*gm.n.f sw(t) ḫrwy (pw) n (y) ꜥḥ3 ḥnꜥ.f* [sic] as restored by Lefebvre; 1944, 218). He then sends for a god, a manifestation of Khonsu, whose image travels to Bakhtan and casts the spirit out. Bentresh recovers instantly. That the stela may allude to mental illness is determined by the following facts: the reference to the malady that seizes her body; the god Khons-the-Provider is described as 'the great god who expels disease demons' (Lichtheim 1980, 92); Bentresh is described as becoming well instantly under the influence of the divine statue's magical protection. Furthermore the phrase 'an enemy with whom one cannot fight' recalls the familiar diagnostic distinction in other medical works between 'an ailment to be treated' and 'an ailment not to be treated' (Clagett 1989, 41 n. 21). The description of one 'who is in the hand of god', sometimes thought to refer specifically to mental illness, is not used here (Westendorf 1977). The cure of Bentresh, although effected by the god, was closely modelled on the dramatic role of physician as warrior that Walker has perceptively described (1990, 91-93): 'the physician cajoled, implored, commanded, threatened or cursed his spirit or demon adversaries', whether treating a bad cold (*P. Ebers* No. 763), a headache (*P. Leiden* 348, 9), or simply removing a bandage (*P. Ebers* No. 2). The

language of the Bentresh stela belongs to the ritual expulsion of what Walker calls illness-spirits, and control of symptom-demons. This does not preclude a link to physical illness. A number of sections of *P. Ebers* have been interpreted as indicators of organic causes for mental illness; as Okasha and Okasha point out, 'It is significant that, in an allegedly demoniac system of medicine, illnesses that were traditionally attributed to possession by evil spirits were often systematically traced to organic diseases.' (2000, 420).

Figure 27 Illustration by Evelyn Paul of the cure of Bentresh, 1915

Perhaps the most misleading illustration of a translation of Egyptian priestly propaganda ever executed. There is no sign of the statue of Khonsu or Thothemheb, and the story has been altered to bring together Ramesses and Bentresh (so ill she has no clothes on). From Spence 1915, pl. opp 178

There is an element of doubt in classifying the stela as a pure forgery. Ghalioungui has cited evidence for 'a kernel of truth' in the story, or some historical event behind it (Ghalioungui 1983, 79). The motivations of the priests in commissioning the stela are not of paramount importance here, but they must be considered in evaluating the evidence for the priests having magical or medical authority and knowledge at the proposed Late Period date. Just as in the case of the interpreters of dreams in Genesis, the House of Life fails to execute its task, but the pre-eminence of its knowledge base is clearly acknowledged.

The Bentresh stela also alludes directly to a curative aspect of this knowledge. There are two problems with this evidence - Thothemheb is not clearly a 'member' of the House of Life himself (he may be from the second group mentioned, the council of the residence), and furthermore his skills lie in his wisdom and his ability to write - not to administer drugs, treatment or perform surgery. So the 'cure' as such, if it had been effected, would have happened through the power of words, rather than medication or physical treatment. The text itself sits uneasily in any single genre - it is neither literary narrative, historical inscription, nor an account of religious ritual, and the apparent political agenda of the priests who composed it renders interpretation of the evidence within it difficult. Considering the probable date of composition, it may reflect a connection between medical knowledge and the House of Life in the Ptolemaic period, projected back to the New Kingdom.

2.4.7 Pharmacopoeia: the myrrh keeper, the chief lector-priest and the king

In the Roman period, two references to the House of Life appear in connection with myrrh, ointment, medicine, and magic. The references are found in *P. Cairo* 58027 (formerly known as *P. Boulaq* VII), in the following contexts:

[the book)... 'must not be seen by any eye save (that of) the king himself or the chief lector-priest or the myrrh-keeper in the House of Life' (*iry ꜥnty(w) m pr-ꜥnḫ*) (3, 14)

'... the great mysterious ointment of the House of Life...' (4, 1). (*gsw ꜥ3 št3 n pr-ꜥnḫ*)

Golénischeff, who published a transcription of the text in 1927, dated this hieratic papyrus of unknown provenance to the first century AD (the reverse of the papyrus carries a later Demotic text). It contains a collection of incantations for the health of the king during the twelve hours of the night. These incantations were intended to be recited above certain drawings within the text, including one of twelve divinities on the final page of the papyrus. Golénischeff suggested the text implied that the document either came from or was intended to be placed within the king's bedroom in the palace (1927, 116).

If the argument that the House of Life incorporated the role of a 'pharmacy' in Roman Egypt were to be accepted, it seems to be dependent on the hypothesis that the House of Life was a medical centre in the Late Period. Gardiner believed that 'It is in the {*pr-ᶜnḫ*} that medical and religious books were written and there it was that all questions relating to such learned matters were settled', writing with reference to the Late Period (1938*a*, 159). There are problems with this theory: firstly, the ambiguity of what is meant by revival and renewal of 'life' at the House of Life, where this process is closely linked to recitation of sacred texts to heal or prolong life, and secondly the considerable amount of evidence for doctors who have no connection with the House of Life.

It is also worth noting that the House of Life is explicitly associated with secrecy, twice, in this papyrus, emphasizing the privileged nature of the knowledge residing in the institution. As Frankfurter has observed about temples in general during the Roman period, '...evidence of healing cults within or in the precincts of temples shows the extent of interplay between popular expectations of healing power from the temple on one hand, and on the other the priesthoods' own responsiveness to these expectations through the redirection of space or erection of structures specifically for healing' (Frankfurter 1998*b*, 47). The House of Life may therefore have come to occupy a niche position of protecting the sleeping king's health and safety in this period.

Frankfurter has stated that 'many temples in the Graeco-Roman period opened considerable medical facilities that combined herbal and "magical" substances with incubation oracles' (1998*b*, 46), citing evidence from Abydos, Deir el-Bahari, and

Dendara. A brief excursus on the uses of myrrh and 'mysterious' or 'secret' ointment in Egypt may shed light on why and how they may have been used at the House of Life.

Myrrh is a gum resin mixed with a small proportion of volatile oil, and was employed from an early date as an important incense material. The name of the substance in *P. Cairo* 58027, *'ntyw*, is usually translated as myrrh, but sometimes mistakenly as frankincense (Lucas 1937, 27; Serpico 2000, 442). A further substance, stacte, thought to be the equivalent of *mḏt*, was extracted from fresh myrrh to produce a type of oil (Lucas 1937, 31). The Egyptians believed that 'aromatic oils, myrrh and substances attracting benevolent gods could repel evil spirits' (Ghalioungui 1973, 145). Herodotus says that myrrh was used for embalming (II, 40; III, 107), probably due to its fragrant qualities (Ikram and Dodson, 106). Guests at banquets were perfumed with myrrh, as well as gods in the temples (Wilkinson 1998, 48). Gardiner associates the evidence of *P. Cairo* 58027 with the example from the Coptos decrees of the Old Kingdom (#2A; see Weill 1912; Hayes 1946; Royer 2000, 62-3), suggesting that drugs 'may have formed part of the regular equipment of the House of Life' (Gardiner 1938*a*, 178); this argument depends on the myrrh of the House of Life being specifically intended for funerary purposes, to successfully link it to the *dbḥw* (perhaps 'requirements') of the Coptos decrees, which are themselves undefined.

Two possible explanations suggest themselves to explain the presence of myrrh at the House of Life. Firstly, some scholars have argued that there was a close organisational relationship between the embalming place (*pr-nfr*) and the House of Life from the New Kingdom onwards (Wildung has even suggested that the *pr-nfr* was a division of the *pr-ᶜnḫ*; 1977, 29, 63). Herodotus' account, together with the evidence of myrrh residues in mummified remains, detected by organic extraction and filtration (Cockburn, Cockburn and Reyman 1998, 78), suggest the possibility that the myrrh at the *pr-ᶜnḫ* was kept for mortuary purposes.

Alternatively, it may indicate that the *pr-ꜥnḫ* functioned as the central store of the *materia medica* of ancient Egypt, which relates to the broader question of native traditions of herbalism and pharmacology.[47] As well as its ability to make the living and the dead smell more interesting, myrrh has numerous therapeutic properties - antiseptic, anti-catarrhal, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, etc (Dolara et al 2000; Zhu 2001). The 'myrrh-keeper' of *P. Cairo* 58027 has given rise to theories that a pharmaceutical corps existed, on the basis of a number of titles referring to drug preparation, and the existence of special rooms in Ptolemaic temples that may have been used as laboratories (Ghalioungui 1973, 149). The myrrh-keeper may have been a *swnw* with a particular role or specialization, or he may have been a pharmacist. Ghalioungui, discussing Jonckheere's proposed pharmaceutical corps, suggests that here in *P. Cairo* 58027 'myrrh [is] standing here for all the pharmaceutical products kept in that institution', which seems an unwarranted assumption (1973, 149). Ghalioungui's reasons for rejecting the medical authenticity of the temple pharmaceutical laboratories are based on his discomfort with treating magical or ritual aromatics and ointments as an undifferentiated element of the Egyptian *materia medica*. In fact, the evidence points to a continuum of the use of myrrh from drug to magical and ritual substance.

Herbal knowledge in dynastic Egypt is a complex area and one hedged with difficulties. Aufrère's work has demonstrated the total integration of the natural world into Egyptian thought, belief ('croyances phytoreligieuses' as he terms them) and health practices (1991, 1998, 1999*a*), and thus it is reasonable to assume that there was a considerable body of knowledge of plant properties *before* Greek herbalism arrived in Egypt (see also Dawson 1929*b*).

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[47] In the Cairo Genizah documents, myrrh is mentioned eight times in lists of *materia medica* (Lev 2007).

Figure 28 Illustrated herbal in Greek, 2nd c. AD, found at Tebtunis (*P. Tebt.* 0679)

UC 1420 Recto; Berkeley, CA

The study of transmission of this knowledge is complicated by our uncertainty about the identification of plant names in ancient languages (Germer 1998). Pliny's criticism of illustrated herbals suggests that contemporary readers were also confused: 'But not only is a picture misleading when the *colours* are so many, particularly as the aim is to copy nature, but besides this, much imperfection arises from the manifold hazards in the accuracy of copyists. In addition, it is not enough for each plant to be painted at one period only of its life, since it alters its appearance with the fourfold changes of the year'*(Natural History* 25.4, trans. Jones 1956, 141).

The fragmentary Demotic herbals that survive have been shown to share sufficient characteristics with earlier texts for health to suggest that they form part of a long textual

tradition (Betro 1988; Tait 1991). This textual tradition may be compared with the knowledge of plants and minerals featuring in magical texts;[48] many 'spells' in the late magical papyri are titled 'prescription' (demotic *phr.(t)*,[49] Greek *pharmakon*; cf under Coptic ⲫⲱⲣⲙⲁⲕⲟⲛ, Crum 282b), and require technical knowledge to assemble their components. Furthermore, in the Greek Magical Papyri, there is a very telling statement preceding the long list of animal ingredients and botanical ingredients (discussed in Dieleman 2005):

'Interpretations which the temple scribes employed, from the holy writings, in translation. Because of the curiosity of the masses they [i.e., the scribes] inscribed the names of herbs and other things which they employed on the statues of the gods, so that they [i.e., the masses], since they do not take precaution, / might not practice magic, [being prevented] by the consequence of their misunderstanding. But we have collected the explanation [of these names] from many copies [of the sacred writings], all of them secret.
Here they are:...'

(PGM XII. 401-44, trans. Betz 1986, 167)

Once again this borrows the rhetoric of secret knowledge, associated with the House of Life since the Middle Kingdom (see p. 61-5 above).

Roughly contemporary with the tradition of herbal knowledge found in the medical-magical papyri, which is non-temple based but nonetheless partially textual, is the record of herbal knowledge alluded to in the Tebtunis priestly manuals' sections on *materia sacra* (*P. Tebt.* H V 1-3):

ZU KENNEN DIE NAMEN DER GEHEIMEN ORTE [, aus denen Krauter geholt werden nach dem Sais der Neith] (Osing 1998, 144-45).

To know the names of the secret places, [where the herbs are to be brought to Sais for Neith].

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[48] The herbal *P. Carlsberg* 230 itself has 'an element of what we should distinguish as magical procedures' according to its editor, such as using garlands of herbs (Tait 1991, 56, and n. 6).
[49] For *phr.(t)*, see Erichsen 1954, 139; Ritner 1993, 57-67.

It names and locates these secret places – in Memphis, Heliopolis, Mendes, Atfih, Sais, Buto, and some other unidentifiable places. The next heading refers to places to obtain earth:

ZU KENNEN DI NAMEN DER [GEHEIMEN (?)] ORTE [, aus denen Erde geholt wird nach dem 'Lebenshäusern']. (Osing 145)

To know the names of the [secret] places, where the earth is to be obtained for the Houses of Life.

Knowledge of where to find these substances is clearly a valued element in the Tebtunis papyri, and there is evidence that the method of gathering herbs was treated as part of a ritual process. A prescription in the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM IV. 2967-3006) purports to describe the work of the herbalist:

'Among the Egyptians herbs are always obtained like this: the herbalist first purifies his own body, then sprinkles it with natron and fumigates the herb with resin from a pine tree after carrying it around the place 3 times. Then, after burning *kyphi* and pouring the libation of milk as he prays, he pulls up the plant while invoking by name the daimon to whom the herb is being dedicated and calling upon him to be more effective for the use for which it is being acquired.'

(PGM IV. 2967-3006, trans. E N O'Neil in Betz 1986, 95)

Knowledge of herbalism is attested in Coptic texts (Erichsen 1963; El Gammal 1992), which may depend on both the native and Greek traditions. In the modern period, Tomei and Maccioni (1995) note that a number of elements in contemporary Egyptian popular medicine have parallels in ancient Egyptian pharmacy. This initially suggests two possibilities: that the pharmacological knowledge of the House of Life was an analogue of popular knowledge of the use of herbs and other substances in healing practices, i.e. that it existed as 'low knowledge' as well as 'high knowledge', or, that it was transferred from the world of 'high knowledge' to 'low knowledge' some time in the first few centuries AD. The route through which it travelled may lie in the syncretistic world of the magical papyri.

2.4.7.1 The 'paradox' of transmission

'Nearly all say that it tasted like chicken, but none can recall that it effected a cure'

(Porter 1958, 118).

The corpus of Egyptian medical and magical texts presents a paradox, in that both useful and useless information seems to be handed down. Dawson put this succinctly:

> When a drug really possesses the virtues attributed to it, and is an effective remedy for disease, its survival into modern times is quite natural, but the fact that many quite fantastic remedies have been carried on almost to our own days, is definite proof of the slavish copying from the works of one writer to another in a continuous line that originated many centuries ago on the banks of the Nile (1929*a*, 137).

In Graeco-Egyptian literary discourse, Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* dismisses the knowledge of pharmacology and magical healing as low knowledge ('it is addicted to magic herbs, and spells are its stock-in-trade; no good ever comes of it'; trans Morgan 1989, 421; see p. 15 above). Clearly this does not fit with the picture of Egyptian practice provided by the evidence discussed above. The paradox of the transmission of useless information may be partly resolved by an example of the consumption of mice for medicinal purposes.

Eating mice seems to be documented from the predynastic to the New Kingdom as a remedy for illness among children (mice were found in the human remains at Naga ed-Deir, and in a spell in *P. Berlin* 3027, 8, 2-3).[50] Initially this would seem interesting but medically pointless to the modern observer, even allowing for its therapeutic magical value. However, Dawson's interest[51] in the subject uncovered comparative documentary

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[50] Dawson was inclined to subscribe to a hyper-diffusionist view of Egyptian remedies spreading to Europe, but he does note occasional continuities in Egypt: 'The belief in the spontaneous generation of mice is very widespread, and still persists amongst the modern Egyptians' (1925, 239). Regarding the spell in *P. Berlin* 3027, mouse is also prescribed for medical or cosmetic purposes in *P. Hearst* 149 to prevent hair turning grey.

[51] Two major articles (1924, 1925), one lecture (see 1929, 139-40), and a number of references in other publications.

material in England and living witnesses who had consumed mice as children,[52] from which he concluded that there were common features in the way that mice were prepared, and that that the recipes are the result of an empirical approach.[53] Recent studies of zootherapy[54] indicate that the use of many animal-product remedies has been a *continuous* practice in the Near East (Holland 1994; Lev 2005). The search for new pharmacological compounds with commercial potential has triggered a resurgence of interest in a number of animal and plant substances formerly dismissed as ludicrous or disgusting. While scientific research periodically legitimates the value of such a substance, its local use may have been continuous for centuries, based on the knowledge that it worked.

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[52] Nunn (1995, 150) also notes an 18thc English remedy of roast pounded mouse for whooping cough. Dawson does not record whether his informants thought the remedy worked, though Porter found the same practise corroborated by her informants in 1950s Cambridgeshire: she noted, 'Nearly all say that it tasted like chicken, but none can recall that it effected a cure' (1958, 118).

[53] 'It will be noted that in nearly every case the mouse must be skinned or cooked for internal use, and split-open for external application' (Dawson 1924, 86).

[54] Zootherapy is the healing of human diseases by use of therapeutics obtained or ultimately derived from animals (Lev 2005).

2.5 Signs of transmission

The evidence for the *pr-ᶜnḫ* as a general locus of transmission is suggested by the foregoing evidence for the recording and consultation of annals, the maintenance of magical and medical expertise based on older traditions, and the teaching of language and scripts. Such evidence can be related to the existing framework of textual transmission in Egypt. This framework is based on a number of signs of transmission – on colophons, rubrics, glosses, copying, translation; on quotation, and allusion. Sometimes the texts say (either truthfully or untruthfully) that they are copies of older texts, and sometimes the evidence for this phenomenon has to be painstakingly extracted through philological analysis. The first question that can be asked is to what extent the evidence for the House of Life fits in to this framework.

2.5.1.1 Colophons

So it ends, from start to finish,
As found in writing

The *Loyalist Teaching* (trans. Parkinson 1997, 241)

This type of colophon tells us that this text has been transmitted – that its original was 'in writing', and that this is a complete copy (see Lenzo Marchese 2004, 360, for a discussion of the expression *iw.f pw*). In fact, the second claim can be misleading: in the case of the *Loyalist Teaching*, the text has been adapted, edited and reused. While the wording of colophons is broadly formulaic, that they could be adapted on occasion is shown by the subtle variances in the colophon of the *Shipwrecked Sailor*, which Rendsburg has argued reflect sounds and terms from the opening lines of the composition (2000, 20). Other internal evidence can demonstrate the actual longevity of the text and support the claim that it was 'found in writing', for example the New Kingdom copies of the *Loyalist Teaching* betraying a Middle Kingdom date of composition through various linguistic features (Posener 1976, 11-16).

The colophon of the copy of the Apophis ritual preserved in *P. Bremner-Rhind* links it with the House of Life (see p. 72 above). As noted, this text from Dynasty 30 may have a Middle Kingdom date of composition. Therefore despite its 'secret' nature, we know that this long and complex magical text was shared and transmitted, and there is a strong possibility that this occurred through copying an older manuscript in an archive of the House of Life.

While the colophons of late Babylonian texts are much fuller than those of Egyptian texts, they provide a useful comparison: some specify that the text was copied from an original belonging to the temple, or comment that the original was in a bad state (de Breucker 2003, 18-19). Egyptian scribes faced similar problems of deteriorating sources, as the text on the Shabako Stone indicates (BM EA 498) in what is effectively an extended version of a colophon:

> 'This writing was copied out anew by his majesty in the House of his father Ptah-South-of-his-Wall, for his majesty found it to be **a work of the ancestors which was worm-eaten, so that it could not be understood from beginning to end**. His majesty copied it anew so that it became better than it had been before, in order that his name might endure and his monument last in the House of his father Ptah-South-of-his-Wall throughout eternity, as a work done by the Son of Re [Shabako] for his father Ptah-Tatenen, so that he might live forever.'
>
> (Lichtheim 1975, 52; emphasis added)

From papyrus or leather, this text was copied on to stone in Dynasty 25, in which form it survived even its later re-use as a millstone.[55]

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[55] The date of the original composition is still a matter of dispute; see Jones 1990, 60. See Droge 2003 for a discussion of the Shabako stone in relation to other 'discoveries' of ancient books in antiquity.

Figure 29 Curating a text: the Shabako Stone

BM EA 498, from Memphis, Egypt. 25th Dynasty, c 700 BC

Scribe of the House of Life Amenwahsu's pseudo-colophon in his tomb inscription (see p. 81 above) also frames and comments on the rest of the text: 'This inscription was written in this tomb by the scribe of the House of Life Amenwahsu with his own finger(s)'. Colophons seem to act like signatures or seals of ownership – they allow the copyist to inject their identity into a standard text.[56] The freedom of designing the selection of texts in his own tomb allowed Amenwahsu to assert his identity, and state his affiliation, inadvertently giving an important clue as to how funerary texts were chosen. Amenwahsu's comment links such standard funerary texts to the House of Life in the New Kingdom, giving concrete evidence that the scribe could either refer to actual master copies of texts at the temple, possibly at the *pr-ᶜnḫ*, or rely on memory of texts learned by

[56] Compare 'artists signatures' (Ware 1927, Keller 1984), or the subtle introduction of symbolic objects such as scribal palettes (indicating literacy, Bryan 1985) to personalize standard compositions.

heart there. Near perfect replication of standard funerary texts, so-called formulae,[57] points towards the use of such pattern texts.

2.5.1.2 Rubrics, glosses: editing activity

Above and beyond the many grammatical functions of rubrics in Egyptian texts (Posener 1975), they are principally signs of the hand of an editor of some kind, and form a meta-text, as do glosses. Rubrics[58] can act as both headings and explanations, as in the water spell from the Harris Magical Papyrus (Section 2.2.1 above) – it begins by telling the reader or user that it is the first spell, and that it comes from the House of Life. One of the earliest uses of the written Egyptian language is for captions to images, the caption helping to define the picture. It could be argued that the habit of glossing, i.e. of explanation, exists at a deep level in the Egyptian mentality, and that this desire for clarity is in continual tension with the desire to protect information.

The Tebtunis papyri demonstrate a particularly wide range of signs of editorial activity (Osing 1998, 34-37), including the liberal use of glosses such as 'Concerning...' (*ir*), 'Another reading' (*ky ḏd*), 'That is to say' or 'In other words' (*ḏd r*), titles and subtitles: 'To know the names of ...' (*rḫ rnw*). The meta-text shows the editors anticipating that the intended reader will need their interpolations – Fragment A of *P. Carlsberg* 180 is titled 'The secret compendium of understanding difficult things' (*p3 3pd št3 n wḥꜥ idn*[.*w*]; Osing 36). The fact that some of these glosses introduce the element of translation (into demotic or Old Coptic) expands the audience that the editors are trying to reach even further, temporally and numerically. The shared use of communicative conventions like rubrics, found from the earliest New Kingdom onomastica to these second-century versions, is instrumental in creating the conditions in which texts may survive for

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[57] The term 'formulae' is used surprisingly loosely by scholars, for lengthy texts as well as simple phrases, often ignoring the important point that variations are more common that adherence to a rigid form of words. Compare Lesko's discussion (1971) of the explosion of variations in the Book of Two Ways on a series of coffins, showing how master-texts may have been cut and pasted in the coffin workshop (1971).

[58] The term has conventionally been used for both red and black text on both coffins and papyri, e.g. in the Book of the Dead (Allen 1936, 146). Allen (humorously?) saw some of the rubrics as 'sales talk' (154).

extremely long periods. The same kind of title and glossing are found in the fragments of *P. Tebt* H I and H II which refer directly to the House of Life (#76 and #77, Table 1; see also p. 115-116 above):

'ZU KENNEN DIE NAMEN DER [GEHEIMEN (?) ORTE [, aus denen Erde geholt wird nach den 'Lebenshäusern'.]' (Osing 1998, 145)

'DIE GROSSEN GÖTTER IM 'LEBENSHAUS': die Götter des 'Nil-Buches' (Osing 1998, 295).

2.5.1.3 Copying and recopying

Textual copying has long been considered the strongest affirmation of transmission. Once used primarily in a conventional way to establish the recension of a given set of texts and find the *Ur*-text, in recent years it has been applied to questions of the changing meanings of texts in the general context of reception studies (e.g. Eyre 2002).

Copying at the *pr-ᶜnḫ* is associated firstly with annals (see p. 92-3 above). Although annals were kept from at least as early as the Old Kingdom, it is only from the New Kingdom onwards that there is evidence that they were written and maintained at the House of Life. These took two forms: mythological records of the gods, and records of the activities of historical events such as expeditions. Their importance was such that we know of two kings who made specific mention of consulting them, Ramesses II and Ramesses IV (2.3.2 above). Scribes such as the family of Amenwahsu were employed to copy out religious annals, while the stelae of Imhotep son of Petearpokrates (2.3.4 above) confirm that these annals were still in use in the Ptolemaic period. Furthermore, the tutelary presence of Thoth (eg #14, #43, #44, #78, Table 1), who copies out the annals (Redford 1986, 66), strongly suggests that this activity was taking place in the House of Life.

Secondly, there is literary evidence linking the House of Life to the practice of copying texts *in situ*. In the demotic story *Setna I*, Naneferkaptah is portrayed habitually walking on the desert (cemetery) hill of Memphis, 'reading the writings that were in the tombs of the Pharaohs and on the stelae of [=written by?] the scribes of the House of Life and the writings that were on / [the other monuments]...' (Simpson 2003, 455; Goldbrunner 2006, 4 = 3.9). Later, Setna and the search party of priests go to the burial area of Coptos,

'turning over the stelae of the scribes of the House of Life and reading the texts that were on them' (Simpson 468; Goldbrunner 29 = 6.9). The story alludes to an otherwise hidden aspect of the way in which texts could be accessed – through visiting the monuments themselves, and copying directly from them. These two extracts happen to refer back to the institution in question, and in fact the whole cycle provides a reflexive portrait of the *pr-ᶜnḫ*, which is mentioned five times (#55-#59). More importantly, they are a reminder that not all transmission of texts occurred through reading and writing papyri in library-like surroundings.

Suggestions of copying from tomb walls is found in one of the New Kingdom harpers' songs, where this is presented as a legitimate, even legitimating, means of transmission. This prompts the question, how had the poet or writer heard them? One possibility, generally overlooked in the debate about the context in which the songs were performed,[59] is that the writer entered the tomb and copied the text *in situ*. The 'Antef song' is known from two sources, one on papyrus, and one on the walls of Paatenemeb's tomb in Saqqara.[60] It is framed by the heading,

'Song which is in the house of King Antef the justified
(And) which is in front of the harpist.'

(trans. Lichtheim 1945, 192)

The song itself is thought to be a product of transmission from a Middle Kingdom original. A phrase in another song inscribed on the walls of a Theban tomb belonging to Nerferhotep (TT 50), again suggests the possibility of visiting, reading and even criticizing the texts inscribed in the tomb: 'I have heard those songs that are in the tombs of old' (1945, 197). The three songs in Neferhotep's tomb are on the walls of the hall and in the passage leading to the shrine. Graffiti left by New Kingdom visitors in Old

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[59] For a discussion of the problem of interpreting the context of the harpers songs, i.e. whether they took place at actual funerary banquets among the deceased's family, or symbolic ones for the tomb-owner themselves, see Lichtheim 1945.
[60] The text is found in the Ramesside *P. Harris* 500 [= *P. BM* 10060], and on a relief from the tomb of Paatenemheb from Saqqara now in Leiden.

Kingdom tombs document visits to tombs (Baines and Lacovara 2002, 17), and the copying of texts may have been one purpose of such visits. These examples, together with the evidence for the copying of images (e.g. Der Manuelian 1994), may support the idea that the tomb was not the closed environment it is often presumed to have been.

2.5.1.4 Translation

In Jasnow's discussion of Late Period copies of 'classical' texts,[61] he finds that there is limited evidence for 'translation' of literary texts from one phase of the language to another prior to the Late Period (1999, 194). One explanation for this may be that the temple elite maintained the ability to read texts in archaic phases of the language, so there was no need to create translations. If this group was sufficiently limited, it would have affected the survival rate of many texts. Yet the evidence of the transmission of some texts, for example the *Wisdom of Ptahhotep*, suggests that an elusive form of oral transmission operated in addition to textual transmission (Roccati 1992, 294). Quirke points out that translations of Old Egyptian religious rituals into Middle Egyptian survive over two thousand years because they were very much in use (Quirke 2006, 269).

Translation activity linked to the House of Life is found in the bilingual and trilingual Canopic decrees (#38-#41), and the bilingual stela of *T3-nfr-ḥr* (BM EA 184) which translates her father's title 'magical protector of the living Apis' into Demotic as *sš pr-ꜥnḫ* (#65; Reymond 1981, 223-230; Quaegebeur 1972, 89). These examples do not prove that the translators were affiliated to the House of Life, just that the term for the institution and its personnel was being translated. Clearly translation skills in the early Roman period were not confined to the House of Life – the bilingual mummy labels (Quaegebeur 1978) and private documents (Aufrère 1999*b*, 43) show a cross-section of society able to function in more than one language.

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[61] He defines these carefully as texts that derive from the Old, Middle, or New Kingdom, rather than texts belonging to a recognized canon or having high status (1999, 193 n. 4).

2.6 Institutional desuetude

Naneferkaptah said to him:
"Why are you laughing at me?"
He said: "I am not laughing at you. I am laughing because you are reading writings that have no [importance for anyone]."

Setna I, Lichtheim 128

(The old priest who laughs at Naneferkaptah then leads him in search of a book that 'Thoth wrote with his own hand' - a book of superior magic, that still did have importance.)

2.6.1.1 'Script death' and the destruction of the manuscript tradition

So closely has the House of Life been identified with the high culture of the ancient Egyptians, that its quiet disappearance from the sources some time before the production of that culture ceased could present a conundrum. As the late evidence shows, either a memory or a contemporary reflection of the *pr-ᶜnḫ* survives in a gnostic text (#74) and a Coptic translation of the Bible (#60). The famous 'final dates' – of the use of hieroglyphs, of hieratic, of demotic – are considerably later. At Philae, the last hieroglyphic text dates to 29 August 394, the latest demotic graffito to 452 AD (Dijkstra 2005, 68), inscribed by a member of a priestly family.[62] 'Script death' is widely considered a momentous event: Geller, discussing the cessation of the use of cuneiform, writes 'When the script of a language is no longer intelligible nor the language spoken, a remarkable event results - the death of a civilization, a clearly definable historical boundary which can almost not be determined by any other objective means' (1997, 44).[63] Similarly, script obsolescence in Egypt is treated in effect as the 'end of history': 'The principal constant element in this narrative is the identification of writing with language, religion, and civilization' (Houston, Baines and Cooper 2003, 450). Not only does this approach privilege literacy

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[62] The latest inscriptional evidence for cultic activities at Philae is the Greek inscription of Pasnous, son of Pachoumios, dated 456/7 (Dijkstra 2005, 80-81).
[63] Compare the discussion of the 'death' of the Coptic language in MacCoull 1986.

above other forms of knowledge, it fails to acknowledge the fact that the death of the knowledge of a given script does not equal the death of knowledge held by the person who used that script. The knowledge of the 'writing of the House of Life', probably indicating hieroglyphic script (as in the sacerdotal decrees, #39-#41, Table 1), outlived the existence of the institution, which as far as the limited evidence shows, is last active during the second century AD at Tebtunis.

2.6.1.2 The *pr-ᶜnḫ* 'falling into ruin'

Recalling the only physical survival of a House of Life at Amarna, abandoned soon after the death of Akhenaten for the same reasons as the rest of Akhetaten,[64] it seems that *if* there were buildings throughout Egypt where texts were produced and people aimed to become 'like a coffer of books', these institutions were so ephemeral that they are invisible in the monumental and archaeological record. If the Amarna *pr-ᶜnḫ* was in Kemp and Garfi's words 'unpretentious and unprotected' (1993, 61), the others may also have been. This suggestion is in opposition to intimations in the textual record which emphasize its grandeur ('It shall be very hidden and very large', *P. Salt* 825, Renewal of the god at the Abydos House of Life 2.2.4 above), and the high status of the knowledge curated there. One conclusion I would like to draw which may resolve these tensions is that it was the knowledge that had high status, rather than those who acquired it.

Thus, looking at the group of individuals (in Table 1) who make reference to their rank at the *pr-ᶜnḫ*, a large number of them are quite ordinary scribes, men such as Yuti, Khons, Nemtet, Messui, Parenen, and Amenwah. Even at moments of high sacred drama or rituals of kingship such as Osorkon II's *sed*-festival, the company of the House of Life is made up of anonymous figures. Koenig has difficulty rationalizing the involvement of Nemtet, the butler from the House of Life, in the harim conspiracy: 'c'est qu'il était un parvenu qui devait son élévation personnelle au roi...Son ingratitude est soulignée' (1989, 57-8). Yet there is ample evidence for the ordinariness of many of the staff of the House of Life, whose roles encompassed 'high' and 'low' knowledge. Iha the teacher from

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[64] See Kemp 1993 for the Christian reoccupation of the tombs and Kom el-Nana.

Bersheh (p. 46-7 above) was also one who "conducts the musicians" (*sṯȝ ḥnr*) (l. 9), "the one who sees the dance in seclusion" (*mȝȝ ḫbt m ḏsr*) (l.13-14), "the one who hears the words alone" (*sḏm mdw m wʿ.w*), (l.15), "the one who locks up the ornaments, the overseer of the royal harem" (*ḫtm ḫkrw, imy-r ipt nsw*) (l. 16) (Ward 1986, 91).

Evidence for a period of institutional crisis at the *pr-ʿnḫ* is first seen in the inscriptions of Peftjau-herawy-Nit (Section 2.4.4 above) and Udjahorresnet (Section 2.4.5 above), where reference is made to the house(s) of life having fallen into a state of ruin. These accounts are widely used to mark the beginning of the decline of the manuscript tradition (Burkard 1994, 104; Jasnow 1999, 203 n. 50). The involvement of members of the House of Life in the harim conspiracy (#13, Table 1) may suggest problems at the institution even in the New Kingdom. The final destruction of the *pr-ʿnḫ* has to be placed very imprecisely some time in the second or third centuries AD, and subsumed into the general picture of the closure of the temples.

2.6.2 Summary

Clearly the nature of the House of Life is a complex question. Most scholars have taken a position somewhere between the two poles of Gardiner's opinion that it was essentially a scriptorium, and Derchain's opinion that it embodied the most secret core of religious life, a view that may gain renewed support from the cryptic aspects suggested by the Book of Thoth (Jasnow and Zauzich 2005). The evidence is too varied, and at the same time too limited, to fully support either position: Gardiner is too dismissive of evidence relating to magical practice, while Derchain, without justification, implicitly extends the evidence for Abydos to all other possible Houses of Life in the country. The first conclusion that can be drawn from this variance of opinion is that the House of Life need not and could not have been an identical institution in all temples. On a geographical axis, Abydos functioned differently from Sais, and on a temporal axis, scriptorial activity varied according to the need for creation of new texts or retention of old texts.

Magical practices of the House of Life included spells for everyday life, magic for state occasions, books of temple ritual concerning revivification of the gods and overthrowing

enemies, and in the Roman period the interpretation of dreams. If we read the story of Setna Khaemwas for evidence of social practice, his training as a magician at the House of Life could have encompassed any of the afore-mentioned activities. Magic was not the exclusive preserve of the House of Life, and may not even have been its prerogative as Ritner has suggested (1993, 205). The earliest evidence of magical expertise dates to the Ramesside period, and there is no firm evidence that it existed there prior to this period.

Medical activity at the House of Life is a problematic issue. The slender evidence of a doctor who was also a scribe of the House of Life, Keku, from the Middle Kingdom, has to be balanced against the substantial evidence for physicians who were not connected with the institution. Restitution of Houses of Life which had fallen into disrepair or disorganisation by two individuals with medical titles, Peftjau-herawy-Nit and Udjahorresnet, may indicate that the House of Life at Sais had a medical purpose but does not prove that all the others did. The Bentresh Stela describes a learned man from the House of Life who may have had magical rather than strictly medical knowledge. In the Roman period, the House of Life seems to be associated with healing, either through the use of myrrh, protective rites, or dream interpretation.

Magic, recording of history and medicine imply learning and knowledge. This knowledge gave the House of Life a degree of power, further enhanced through the secrecy surrounding its books and records, and it is useful to conclude with some brief comments on the nature of that power. Framing the period for which we have evidence of the House of Life are two sets of decrees relating to the temple priesthood - the Coptos decrees from the reign of Pepy II, and the Ptolemaic sacerdotal decrees. Both suggest that the House of Life was an institution with some power and authority. At Coptos, without the exemption afforded by the king, the temple would have been obliged to furnish the 'apparatus' or requirements of the House of Life. In the sacerdotal decrees, the priests of the House of Life are vital members of the synod, who regulate the calendar, devise the writing of Berenice's name, and compose hymns which they then record in the 'books of the House of Life' (Simpson 1996, 225, 232, 241). The impression all these decrees give is of a special body of priests who must be involved in matters relating to the rituals of religious life. This image is endorsed by the description of the people who enter into the House of

Life at Abydos in *P. Salt* 825: '"Properly silent of mouth, their mouths and bodies covered, they are far removed from any repulsive violence"' (Clagett 1989, 31). Yet three of the conspirators in the harim plot against Ramesses III were members of the House of Life, recruited perhaps because they had access to hostile spells (Ritner 1993, 213). The group of papyri relating to the plot gives us 'a glimpse into the interesting and picturesque villainies that took place behind the curtain' (De Buck 1937, 152), and suggest that during the reign of Ramesses III the House of Life was prepared to engage in 'repulsive violence' and in larger political struggles.

3 Biographies of the Tomb I

De nombreux exemples pourraient être évoqués pour illustrer l'attrait du passé prestigieux, et cela à divers niveaux de la civilisation pharaonique: la valeur des écrits anciens, notamment en matière religieuse, le goût pour les fables dont l'intrigue se situe dans un passé plus ou moin mythifié, la politique architecturale des pharaons dont le pieux souci de réfection des monuments anciens se manifeste continuellement.

(Volokhine 1998, 76)

Why is a Coptic monk preferred as a sorcerer? Why does the touching of ancient statues make a woman conceive? Why does the written charm from the sorcerer, burned in a pot of incense, make wish become reality? Because it is *qadim*. Because it holds in itself the power of the past.

(Ayrout 1963, 100-101)

...toute l'écriture, tout l'art en palimpseste, et que ce palimpseste soit inépuisable, ce qui a été écrit revenant sans cesse dans ce qui s'écrit pour le rendre sur-lisible - c'est-à-dire illisible.

(Barthes 1982, *L'Obvie et l'Obtus*, 201)

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The concept of biographies of the tomb

Biographies, from dynastic Egypt, are most familiar as narrative accounts of individual life-experiences inscribed on the walls of their tombs. Weni describes every promotion: 'Never before had the like been done for any servant – but I was excellent in his majesty's heart, I was rooted in his majesty's heart' (Lichtheim 1975, 19);[65] Ahmose son of Abana says: 'I speak to you, all people. I let you know what favors came to me'; Paheri assures the reader he is happy, and ready to assist the living: 'I have furnished my place in the graveyard. I have what I need in all things, I shall not fail to respond' (Lichtheim 1976, 12; 20).[66] Hundreds of voices of the dead can be heard, describing lives which are

[65] Weni lived during the Sixth Dynasty; his monument at Abydos may have been a cenotaph rather than a tomb.
[66] Both Ahmose and his grandson Paheri lived during the Eighteenth Dynasty, and their tombs lie at El Kab.

understood to be carefully crafted epitaphs, intended to secure a place among the resurrected. Precursors to these tomb biographies may be sought in Fourth Dynasty stelae and relief sequences (Baines 1999),[67] and in parallel presentations of the self in tomb statuary, but the written tomb biography is a central expression of Egyptian mortuary culture from the Old Kingdom to the Graeco-Roman period.[68] The limitless propagandistic power of biography was explored further by Christian hagiography, which descends from the panegyric or encomium more than the tomb biography. The *Life* of St Antony was read from Trier to Milan within fifty years of Athanasius writing it. By the fourth century AD, biography in Egypt was thoroughly detached from the tomb walls, although those who actually lived in isolated tombs, or the crowded desert at Scetis, continued to be mythologized.[69]

Many theoretical approaches to concepts of biography applied to an object or a place (Tringham's life-history of Neolithic houses, Strathern's interpretation of Melanesian objects as mobile elements circulating through the social body, Meskell's use of Kant's *Ding an Sich* and anthropologizing of the embedded object)[70] look back to Kopytoff's basic idea that one can ask similar questions about an object to those one asks about people:

> Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized "ages" or periods in the thing's "life" and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness? (1986, 67).

Kopytoff demonstrated the elegance and flexibility of the idea through examples of the biography of a car in Africa, and a family hut among the Suku in Zaire.

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[67] Baines sees a division occurring in the Fourth Dynasty, between self-presentation of the owner, his titles, and an offering formula, and the rarer narrative biography, and argues that the former is performative while the latter is commemorative. Precursors to the narrative form of biography are suggested to lie in pictorial representations such as those in the early Third Dynasty tomb of Hezyre at Saqqara.

[68] For a recent discussion of the tomb biography as self-presentation, see Morenz 2003.

[69] Sisoes says Scetis had become crowded (*Apophthegmata Patrum* Sisoes 28, Ward 1984, 218).

[70] Survey (not including Meskell) in Gosden and Marshall, 1999; Meskell 2004, 58.

The Egyptian tomb is fundamental to our understanding of pharaonic culture. Meskell has written, 'At a meta-level one could see the construction of the tomb, and tomb culture in general, as the most salient evocation of the specific configuration of Egyptian materiality and its potency' (2004, 7). Yet its biography has often been 'partial', as Kopytoff suggested biographies of things often are (1986, 68), focussing on one moment (the identity and burial of the original owner), almost inevitably within the pharaonic period, and giving little consideration to physical modifications, let alone continuities and transformation in cultural meanings.

The alteration of texts however has received attention, and clear recognition given to the awareness by the person/s responsible for the second or third text, of the significance of the original. Particular attention has been paid for example to the afterlife of Amarna texts: Der Manuelian writes, 'Altering the historical record, attacking personal enemies, censoring a religious event, are all motives for the "mark of the second hand" erasure, which presupposes a certain level of knowledge by the perpetrator' (1999, 286). Yet the same level of knowledge by the 'perpetrator' is almost never recognized in cases of non-textual successive interventions, as will be seen. It is as though instances of 'iconoclasm' and 'usurpation' betray an oddly disconnected and fragmented understanding of the meaning of the objects or texts they employ, while most of the time people are assumed to move through their environment in a state of ignorance of its history and meaning.

3.1.2 **The palimpsest of the tomb**

The occupation and re-use of pharaonic tombs constitutes the material for an exploration of the palimpsest as a mode of knowledge-transmission. The explicit purpose of the pharaonic tomb was to provide an undisturbed place of safety for the body of the deceased, and a place where the living could intercede for the dead. Yet this is not the history of the majority of tombs, certainly of those built for the elite.

The first 'rewriting' of the tomb's role was its appropriation for another occupant. Spoliation could precede or follow this stage, suggesting what Kemp has called a 'compromised attitude towards the sacred' (Kemp 1995, 38). Or piety could reassert

itself, for example in the case of Udjahorresnet's sixth century BC tomb at Abusir, where the limestone corridor was repaired using mudbrick, following an aggressive robbery of the tomb (Verner 1989). Generations of descendants of the deceased might choose to add themselves to a tomb, or in the case of multiple intrusive burials, such as in the Memphite necropolis, large numbers of unrelated occupants took over a burial space after a longer interval of time. The upper chambers of Iurudef's Ramesside tomb were appropriated for a number of burials of 'ordinary people' during the 21st Dynasty; Martin observed that 'in the past excavators have tended to throw such material aside, especially if damaged, as being of no scientific or intrinsic interest' (1991, 141). This pattern of usurpation by less wealthy, perhaps less educated, people is repeated in thousands of tombs all over Egypt.[71]

A change of use occurs in Roman Egypt, where we find the vanguard of Christians choosing to live, rather than be buried, in ancient tombs. This raises a number of questions as to why and in what way this happened – what it meant, whether it was regional, whether driven by ideology or practicality, how the new occupants treated the old, and how they changed the space; how those who visited the tombs perceived continuity and change from their previous pattern of visiting tombs while carrying out funerary cults. Antony lived in the tombs for five years, beginning his long struggle with the demons, and there was a huge community of Christian hermits living in tombs in the Thebaid in the fourth century. In the Valley of the Queens, the mummified burial places of 'pagans' transitioned seamlessly into the use of tombs as dwellings for Coptic monks affiliated to the great monasteries below (Lecuyot 1993). Where an unfinished Twentieth Dynasty tomb even became the foundations for a Roman sanctuary dedicated to Montu-Ra during the first half of the second century AD, it must have been revealed again by the violent destruction of the sanctuary in the fourth century and subsequent building of the monastery of Deir el-Roumi on top of the tomb.[72] In this case, the tomb's history involves

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[71] As evidenced by the illegible and meaningless hieroglyphs on the funerary equipment of the intrusive burials (see Martin 1991, fig. 97).
[72] The tomb in question is QV 95 (Lecuyot 1993, 263); see also Lecuyot 1992.

successive occupants laying claim to a precise location and thereby dictating the terms of its sanctity.[73]

What does this say about what tomb re-use meant? Pharaonic texts demonstrate attitudes towards the security and value of the closed tomb ranging from confidence in one's own tomb becoming a 'house for eternity' for the dead person's remaining personality/soul and physical self, to anxiety about the pointlessness of such preparations and the vulnerability of the tomb. Both these attitudes are expressed in very special genres and contexts. Other documentary and archaeological evidence suggests that there was a *de facto* acceptance of reburial, and of removal of objects from the tomb, forming part of the wider dualistic attitude towards death and the likelihood of resurrection (Zandee 1960).

The following exploration of the history of particular Egyptian tombs 'reads' layers of meaning which themselves look back at earlier meanings – in other words where there appears to be a conscious dialogue taking place with the past. This formulation of the palimpsest fits into the broad approach of tracing the long-term interaction of people and objects, often termed the cultural biography of things. By interpreting certain tombs as palimpsests, I hope to go beyond taking the evidence often grouped under the theme of 'usurpation' in Egyptology, which takes for granted motives of claiming credit for or possession of objects and places, and to demonstrate the presence of collective narratives anchored in the man-made landscape where meaning was shared and transferred over extremely long time periods.

3.2 Abydos: repetition, transformation, continuity

Minucius Felix (*c.*200 AD), with sardonic intent, commented on the repetitive telling of the story of Isis and Osiris through the performance of the 'mysteries' at Abydos:

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[73] Lecuyot's view: 'The destruction of the Roman sanctuary is, no doubt, an illustration of the struggle between the last pagans and the first Christians, and the establishment in the necropolis of this monastic community was perhaps also a manner of exorcising the demons' (1992, 272).

'And lastly, consider the sacred rites of the mysteries; you will find tragic deaths, dooms, funerals, mourning and lamentations of woebegone gods...and, year by year, they cease not to lose what they find or to find what they lose.'

(*Octavius* XXIII.1, trans. Rendall 1960, 380-3)[74]

In the desert foothills at Umm el-Qaab, an equally sacred act – the burial of the dead king Osiris – was repeated after one thousand years, with an associated funerary cult taking place from *c*.2900 BC to *c*. AD 500. Continuity of the veneration of a dead king is evident until the Christian period, at which point the pattern superficially changes to one of destruction and iconoclasm, repeated even up until Amélineau's evening suppers burning the coffin wood in 1899 (Petrie 1931, 172-3).[75] At the same time, a continuation of certain elements of the practice of the cult can be detected. Very little happens in isolation at Abydos, at any period, so while the focus of the discussion will be Tomb O at Umm el-Qaab, relationships with other relevant parts of the site will be brought into the discussion.[76]

3.2.1 The Tomb Of Djer

The tomb of Djer, the second king of the First Dynasty, was designated as Tomb O by Petrie at Umm el-Qaab, when he wrested control of the site from Amélineau in 1899. Djer is thought to have achieved a long reign, of around fifty years (Kaplony 1975, 1110; Dreyer 2003, 103), and his tomb is a substantial structure lying close to those of Aha (Tomb B19), Djet/Wadj (Tomb Z), Peribsen (Tomb P) and Den (Tomb T) (see Figure 30 below). The central subterranean tomb chamber was built of wood, measuring *c*.28ft

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[74] 'Considera denique sacra ipsa et ipsa mysteria: invenies exitus tristes, fata et funera et luctus atque planctus miserorum deorum... nec desinunt annis omnibus vel perdere quod inveniunt vel invenire quod perdunt' (*Octavius* XXIII.1, in Rendall 1960, 382-3). While Minucius Felix is referring to the enactment of the mysteries throughout the Roman world, it is likely that their form was related to those performed at Abydos.

[75] Petrie's scathing remarks about Amélineau's work at Umm el-Qaab should be read in the broader context of Franco-British rivalry, but as Petrie pointed out, Amélineau himself admitted burning wood in the tombs (Petrie 1931, 172-3).

[76] Even the very isolated Coptic 5th-6th c 'hermitage', discovered in the wadi in the hills and published by Hilda Petrie, contains inscriptions relating to the wider network of monastic sites in Abydos (H Petrie 1925).

square; around it brick cells were built, opening off the chamber on all four sides, making the overall size of the tomb 43 x 38 ft. The floor was wood, over a layer of brick laid straight onto clean sand. Like the other royal First Dynasty tombs, it was uninscribed and undecorated except for some red painted recesses, similar to those in the tomb of his successor Djet (Petrie 1901, 8). The king's body was not found in the tomb, although the finds of a skull and bandaged arm during Petrie's and Amélineau's excavations have not been satisfactorily explained.[77] However, a rich collection of Djer's burial goods can be reconstructed from fragmentary remains found either in the tomb or dispersed close by; these comprise stone vessels in large numbers, pottery vessels, wooden labels, statuettes, inscribed ivory and ebony objects (Porter and Moss V, 78-9). Further material has recently been found by the German Archaeological Institute in the spoil heaps of earlier excavations, and during the clearance of Den's tomb (Dreyer et al 2003, 103-7; 137). Finally, the ranks of hundreds satellite burials of Djer's retainers should be mentioned;[78] the number of burials discovered has risen from around 300 in Petrie's time to over 590 identified by the DAI (Crubézy and Midant Reynes 2000, 33 n. 46). At Djer's tomb, the number and style of these subsidiary tombs marked a new departure in tomb design (Reisner 1936, 77-81). Two kilometres to the north of the tomb, Djer's funerary enclosure was surrounded by 269 subsidiary burials, referred to by Petrie as the 'Tombs of the Courtiers' (1925; see Dreyer 1990, 71-2 on the re-excavation of subsidiary burials). Many of the occupants of these tombs were women (76 out of 97 stelae according to Kemp 1967, 25-6), but the osteological evidence from this heavily reused area is largely scattered and lost: 'Aucun squelette en place n'a été mis au jour, ni à l'intérieur des tombes, ni dans les tombes subsidiaires' (Crubézy and Midant Reynes, 36). Reisner proposed that some of these individuals died naturally and were buried in thoughtfully prepared tombs, while others were ceremoniously killed at the king's death; he termed these '*sati*-burials' (1936, 120). The hypothesis of a mixed system is broadly accepted,

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[77] The skull and bandaged arm found in the tomb, both possibly belonging to Djer or a queen, were lost and discarded respectively (Ikram and Dodson 1998, 320).

[78] Needler (1956) suggested a link between the ceremonial flint knife (see Figure 35, on page 149 below) and animal or even human sacrifice at the royal funeral, which is probably depicted on the well-known Djer label found at Saqqara (Saqqara S3035, Cairo JE 70114); see also Baud and Etienne 2000; Crubézy and Midant-Reynes 2000.

with the discovery of the bones of under-25 year old men at Aha's tomb lending further credence to the likelihood of human sacrifice associated with early Dynastic royal interment (Baud and Etienne 2000).[79] Petrie found ivory lions, copper tools and a gold pin and tablet in these graves (1901, 9).

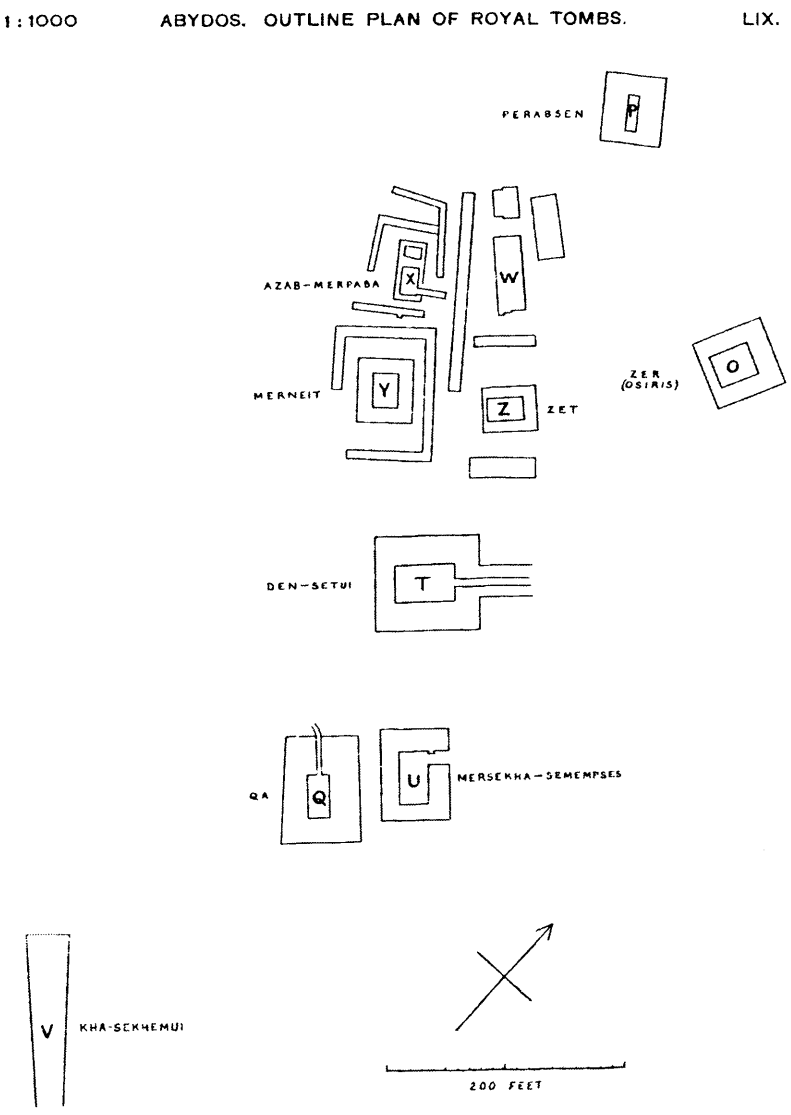

Figure 30 Petrie's plan of Umm el-Qaab in 1900, showing Zer's (Djer's) tomb

From Petrie 1901, II, pl. LIX

[79] Baud and Etienne have suggested that the arrangement of the subsidiary tombs around the main tomb may be linked to the idea that they are offerings deposited for the king (2000, 61-2).

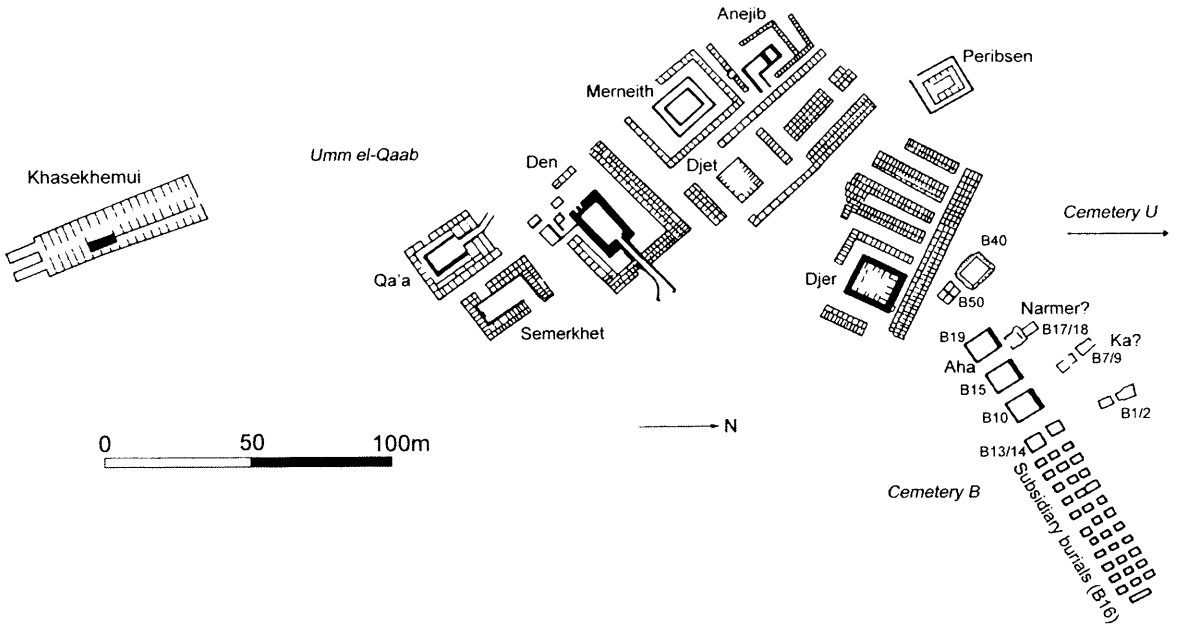

Figure 31 Plan of Umm el-Qaab and Cemetery B

From Wengrow 2006, fig. 10.16

How long this tomb remained in its original state can only be estimated – at the most, perhaps until the end of the Old Kingdom; I will return to the question of its visibility above-ground. During this period, other royal tombs and satellite burials were constructed within a few metres of Djer's tomb, namely those of Merneith, Djet and Den, so the site of Umm el-Qaab was filled with human activity (Figure 31). Cult activity at the tomb, connected with the royal funerary rites, is harder to describe both in terms of frequency and longevity, as is the relationship with the vast funerary enclosures. Remains of wooden statues were recorded in the tomb of Djer, which may suggest that some form of royal cult was performed involving them (Arnold 1997, 263 n. 62). In addition, the deliberate gap left at the south-west corner in the arrangement of subsidiary burials may have provided access for repeated visits to a surface or subterranean cult place (O'Connor 2002, 174).

By contrast, the massive funerary enclosure of Djer in the northern cemetery, located by O'Connor in 1988, had entrances near the east and north corners which were blocked up

with Early Dynastic bricks. O'Connor suggested that although these entrances were different from those at a contemporary tomb at Saqqara, where access to the burial chamber was required during the actual funerary ceremonies, the enclosure was nonetheless sealed once it had been dedicated to its royal owner (1989, 76-81; see also 2001, 174). Royal tomb building at Umm el-Qaab continued throughout the First Dynasty, then ceased in the Second Dynasty before resuming for the burial of Peribsen immediately beside Djer's tomb, and the large complex of Khasekhemwy at the southernmost extreme of the burial site.

The textual and archaeological evidence for the subsequent history of the tomb, which involve a long series of structural modifications of Djer's tomb probably relating to cult activity, form a continual process of transformation of meaning. These transformations took place alongside parallel modifications of other tombs at Umm el-Qaab, but Djer's tomb gradually acquired pre-eminent status. While the burial of Djer is not the end of a discrete chapter in the biography of this tomb, it defines the primary locus of meaning and allows us to ask when, how and why the tomb's identity changed.

3.2.2 Textual record

The re-occupation of Djer's tomb begs the question of whether it indicates the forgetting or the deliberate remembrance of and connection with a past king. The textual evidence attesting to the memory of Djer begins with the king lists.[80] The First Dynasty seal impressions recently found at Abydos list Djer in the expected order of First Dynasty rulers (Dreyer 1987; 1996, 71-3), which suggests that, unsurprisingly, as far as the reigns of Den and later Qa'a, Djer was clearly remembered. The Palermo Stone and Cairo Fragment I give some details of the first ten years and nine middle years of Djer's reign respectively; regardless of whether the year names reflect historical events or symbolic discourse, they suggest at the time of the making of these annals, Djer was a fixed and substantial historical memory in a temple milieu where the annals stone may have been

[80] 'King lists' is used here in its broadest sense, including both Redford's 'true' kinglists and 'cultic assemblages of deceased kings' (Redford 1986, chapter 1).

displayed (Helck 1970*b*, 85). The date of composition and inscription is thought to lie either in the Fifth Dynasty where the annals end or shortly thereafter, or to be a later copy of an Old Kingdom original.[81]

In the king list on the wall of the mortuary temple of Seti in the south section of Abydos, Djer appears identified by his name *Iti,* as on the Cairo fragment (Helck 1956, 9; Wilkinson 2000, 186), as the third king of the First Dynasty. It is probable that Djer was included in the Abydos list of Ramesses II (BM EA 117 and *in situ*), which copies the format of the list in the Seti inscription, but his name would be found in the lost rows (reconstructed in *KRI*, II, 540-1, and *RITA*, II, 348-9). There is a lacuna in the Turin Canon (*c*.1200 BC) which would allow for a reading of *Iti* (Gardiner 1959, Plate I Col. II); most agree that this document on reused papyrus is 'only the sole survivor of a long line of lists which must have been copied over many centuries' (Redford 1986, 2).

Figure 32 Memory of Djer: the King List at the Temple of Seti I, Abydos

From www.aegyptenfans.de

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[81] For a recent summary and discussion of all the arguments, see Wilkinson 2000, 23-4, 28-60. This study omits the South Saqqara Stone, recently rediscovered by Baud and Dobrev (1995; see further Baud 2003); as the extant inscription only covers the Sixth Dynasty, Djer does not feature on it.

Thus, a continuous knowledge of Djer as a ruler can be cautiously posited until at least *c.*1200 BC, including at the settlement nearest his tomb, but arguably among a restricted community who took an interest in reading the king lists in these temples.

In the Late Period, however, a modest cult of Djer may be suggested by the evidence that he was 'remembered' as a great physician, through his writings on anatomy and the treatment of diseases which were apparently in circulation in late antiquity. The evidence for this tradition comes from Manetho, writing in the third century BC but preserved only in later sources. Of 'Athothis', who is generally agreed to be Djer, Manetho says 'his anatomical works are extant, for he was a physician' (from the *Epitome*, according to Africanus via Syncellus; Waddell 1940, 29), similarly 'he practised medicine and wrote anatomical books' (according to Eusebius, via Syncellus; Waddell 31); the Armenian version of Eusebius slightly elaborates on the genre of the books, stating that he 'practised the art of medicine, writing books on the method of anatomy' (Waddell 33).[82] However, there is no evidence to suggest that this cult was localized at Abydos in the Late Period, so the most that can be said is that the tradition accorded Djer a reputation of erudition and an interest in healing.

Manetho's testimony can however be related to the earlier evidence given by *P. Berlin* 163, dating to *c.*1350-1200 BC and found in a jar at Saqqara. In this, it is stated that Djer wrote a book on anatomy which was discovered under the reign of Semti (*ḳnti*, equated with Den; von Beckerath 1999, 38), and was later used as a reference text in treating the illness of the Second Dynasty king Senedj, one of the three kings Manetho inserts between Peribsen and Khasekhemwy.

Traditions of kings and sages remembered for their intelligence or authorship are known throughout the pharaonic period. Some of these attributions are argued to be

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[82] Fr. 6, from Syncellus, according to Africanus; Fr 7 (a), from Syncellus, according to Eusebius; Fr 7 (b), Armenian version of Eusebius: 'medicam item artem coluit, quin et libros de ratione secandorum corporum scripsit' (Waddell 1940, 32). Additionally, Africanus and Eusebius both say that Athothis built a palace in Memphis, and give reign lengths of 57 and 27 years respectively.

pseudepigraphical, such as the instructions of Ptahhotep, Amenemhet, and Khety (Fischer-Elfert 2003, 123; Parkinson 1991, 97), while New Kingdom instructions such as those of Ani and Amenemope are thought to be genuine compositions by historical figures. In Middle Kingdom instruction texts, we find the marrying up of historical individuals with literary texts, for example Hardjedef and Ptahhotep with their eponymous instructions, or the depiction of a royal figure who is not the author, but a character – Snofru, Khufu, Pepy II, Setna Khaemwas. In the New Kingdom, an active memory of certain kings and sages is demonstrated by evidence such as the Saqqara tomb relief (Figure 33)[83] with its 'gallery' of kings, viziers, high-priests of Ptah, among whom ancient authors have been identified, and *P. Chester Beatty* IV's well known verse beginning 'Is there one here like Djedefhor/ Hardedef?' (Fischer-Elfert 2003, 126).

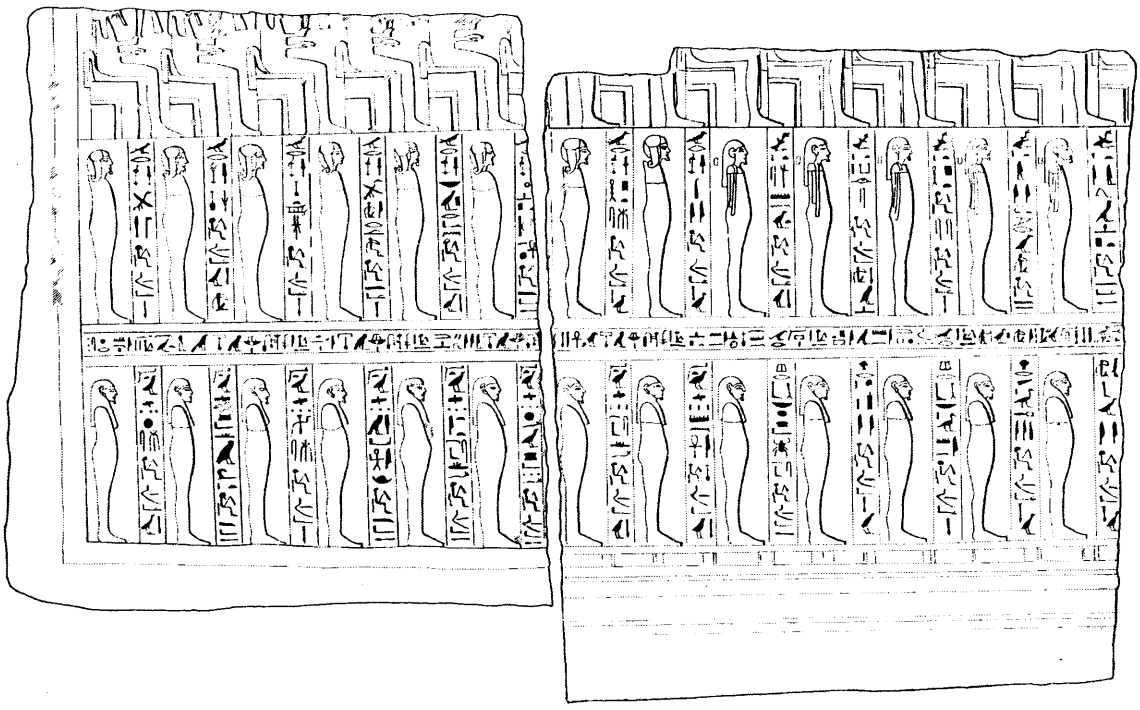

Figure 33 Kings, viziers and high priests of the past: tomb relief ('Fragment Daressy'), probably from Saqqara, 19th Dynasty

From Wildung 1984, fig. 4

[83] The additional evidence of *P. Athens Nat. Libr.* 1826, presented by Fischer-Elfert, supports the assertion of an active memory of historical sages (2003, 128-9).

Williams has argued that 'learned men of the New Kingdom accepted the traditional role of these figures as the authors of works associated with their names, or at least with some of their contents' (1981, 9), implying that the accuracy of these attributions was not paramount to later audiences. Daressy copied the relief (published in Yoyotte 1952), since when it has effectively been lost, although W K Simpson saw it in a magazine at Saqqara in the early 1980s (Wildung 1977, 28-9). Fischer-Elfert has recently suggested that it may have come from the tomb of Khaemwas, the scholar-prince who was himself a high priest of Ptah at Memphis like eight of the figures in the second register of the relief (2003, 131).

This pattern of the acceptance of 'authorship', and the development of characterization of past kings, gives a framework against which to evaluate the tradition of Djer as author and physician. Within Manetho's text, Djer's reputation can be compared with other kings either with medical skill or who wrote books like Tosorthos (Djoser), who 'because of his medical skill has the reputation of Asclepios among the Egyptians ... He also devoted attention to writing' (Waddell 42-3), or Suphis (Khufu), who 'composed the Sacred Book' (47). Djoser has been conflated in Manetho with Imhotep/Aesclepius, himself the subject of a cult which reached its height in the Late Period (Wildung 1977).[84] These special attributes of certain royal figures continue to surface in the literature centuries after their deaths, as when Ibn Wahshiyah (9th-10th c AD) relates that Cleopatra wrote a book on toxicology (El Daly 2005, 135).[85]

The problem is whether the evidence points to a continuous tradition, or instead to an exercise in creativity, a brand-new 'legend' serving contemporary purposes. In the Egyptians' attitude towards their own past, 'a consistent feature is the recognition that

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[84] On the question of Imhotep's authorship of a lost wisdom instruction, see Brunner 1979. Shupak refers to Brunner's 'convincing proofs of the existence of the Imhotep Instruction' (2001, 540), but Brunner's arguments were rejected by Baines (1991, 123-200).

[85] See also Fraser 1972, 1:372; 2:548 n. 306, for the evidence for Cleopatra's interest in and writings on drugs, cosmetics and metrology to which Ibn Wahshiyah's claim may relate. A significant failing of textual biography is that although the biography of physicians forms a major genre of Arabic scholarship, it excluded non-Muslims during the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, thus 'biographical literature leaves us totally ignorant about a whole group which probably formed the bulk of this profession' 337 (Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, 337).

some kings were more significant than others' (Tait 2003*a*, 13). On the one hand, with the passage of time there is greater opportunity to use historical individuals with freedom in literary composition, because the fine detail of their real biography has faded. On the other, we cannot dismiss the possible authenticity of the brief biographical details, or characterizations, offered by the very different tradition of the annals as they emerge in Manetho. Djer's medical text is not known, but if we are prepared to accept the authenticity of a lost wisdom teaching of Imhotep, attested to by a New Kingdom copy of a harper's song, we should not rule out a possible lost work attributed to Djer.[86]

Again, a palimpsestual interpretation of these textual memories of earlier kings offers a way out of the impasse of defining these examples as either accurately preserved memory, versus purely fictional use of historical characters. The characters are initially collectively selected according to their influential qualities during their lives, then embellishments are added over time that often reify qualities of wisdom and healing – they wrote books (which are lost), or carried out acts of healing. Their place in social memory is grounded in strong geographical associations, but is sufficiently flexible to allow one sanctified figure to be conflated with another. This process forms a more tightly structured development than the broader project of the kind of religious syncretism that is ongoing throughout the dynastic period.

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[86] 'I have heard the words of Imhotep and Hardedef, whose sayings are recited whole' (trans Lichtheim 1973, 196), discussed by Fischer-Elfert: 'Although nothing seems to be preserved of the instructions of Imhotep, in contrast to the instructions of Djedefhor/Hardedef, it is possible that a previously unidentified literary ostracon may one day turn out to belong to 'his' text' (2003, 122).

3.2.3 Physical evidence – the tomb itself

3.2.3.1 Visibility of the tomb in the landscape

Although Djer's tomb lay beneath 1.8-2.4 m of sand when it was originally constructed, Petrie suggested that it would have been marked by two great stelae standing on the east side of the tomb, similar to those of Merneith, Qaa, Djet and Semerkhet.[87] These remarkably stark and simple monuments formed a clearly visible field. Petrie surmised that they were blown over or 'upset wantonly' at some unknown point, perhaps during the Old and Middle Kingdom when the cemetery fell into decay (1900, 6). An un-provenanced stela of Djer (Newberry 1914, 35), now in the Cairo Museum (JE 34992), may be a marker from the tomb at Abydos (Figure 34 below).

The forms of superstructure that have been suggested for the royal tombs at Umm el-Qaab vary from a double mound covered by a wood and reed shrine (Dreyer 1991), to a surface chapel flanked by a low mound to its north or northeast (O'Connor 2001, 175). While all these elements are conjectural due to their almost complete destruction,[88] there is general agreement that the tombs were marked and made deliberately visible by a raised surface feature as well as the pairs of stelae already mentioned.

Until at least the reign of Khasekhemwy in the Second Dynasty, it is fair to assume that the tomb remained intact although not necessarily closed. The tombs at Umm el-Qaab often include objects from successive rulers, implying that they were deliberately placed there for cultic reasons after the owner's death and interment, such as the seal impression of Netjerikhet (Djoser) in the tomb of Khasekhemwy (Dreyer 2003, 115).

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[87] In the Second Dynasty, Peribsen and Khasekhemwy each had two stelae, similar in form to the earlier ones; a single stela exists for Raneb, but is supposed to come from Saqqara. Fischer (1961) discusses the entire group of royal stelae including the missing examples of Narmer and Den.
[88] There are remains of a very low wall around the tomb of Djet (Kemp 1966, 18-19 and n. 18).

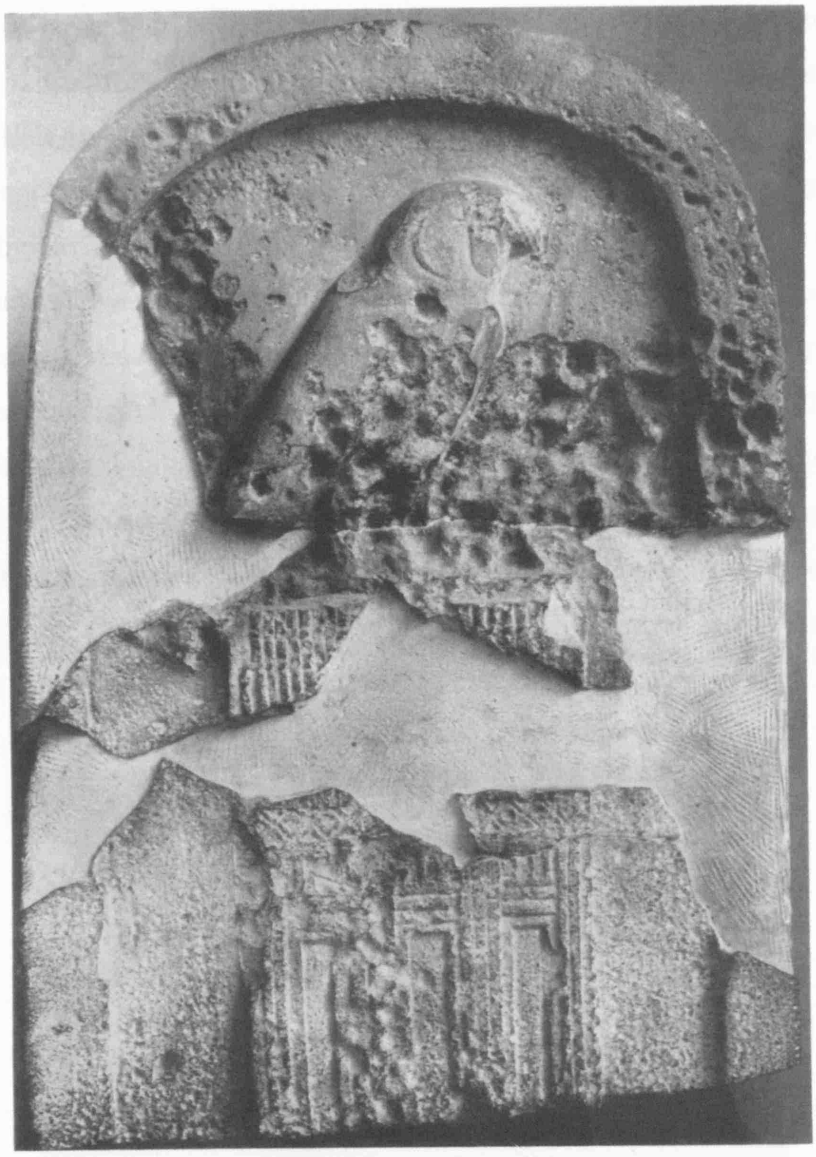

Figure 34 Stela of Djer (Cairo JE 34922), which may have marked the tomb at Abydos

From Fischer 1961, fig. 6.

There is then a long gap in the archaeological record, until the resumption of activity in the Middle Kingdom.[89] One object which may shed some light on this otherwise silent period at the tomb is the find of an Old Kingdom offering table within it (Amélineau 1897-98, 33-4 [5], 299 [top], 616-19).

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[89] The same lack of significant activity is found at Djer's enclosure (O'Connor 1989, 73).

Stone vessels in large numbers were found broken into fragments and scattered around the tomb; the explanation usually given is that this was carried out by ancient looters (Hendrickx, Bielen and de Paepe 2001, 86). The assumption is often made that the stone vessels were not of sufficient value to actually remove from the site. This is partially contradicted by the fact that such stone vessels were sufficiently appreciated that they have been found all over the Mediterranean. Evidence from Crete, where local production of imitation early Dynastic vessels occurred in the Neopalatial phase (corresponding to the Second Intermediate Period/early New Kingdom), may be interpreted either as an indicator of early third millennium trade or of the arrival of recently robbed tomb goods (Bevan 2003, 68). Because the date of the arrival of the Egyptian originals has not been determined, no conclusions can be drawn as to the pattern of behaviour at the tombs themselves, but the Cretan evidence suggests that outside Egypt these vessels were high status objects found in a limited number of elite contexts.

Figure 35 Flint and gold knife impressed with Horus banner and name of Djer

Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto 914.3[90]

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[90] Published in Needler 1956; see also Baumgartel 1960, 6. Willoughby and Stanton note the uncertainty about the pre-deposition context of this knife: 'Although the royal description on this object indicates that it either belonged to King Djer or was a special gift given by the ruler,

There are a number of unprovenanced objects relating to Djer, such as the flint and gold knife purchased in Luxor (see Figure 35 above), which are potentially part of the corpus of original burial equipment. All around the tomb of Den, recently discovered deposits include fragmentary material from Djer's tomb (Dreyer 2003). Given that it was found within the spoil heaps of earlier excavations, the date of the removal of this material from Djer's tomb is unknown, but other material seems likely to have been removed during 'restoration' activities at Den's tomb in the Middle Kingdom. To the east and south-east of the staircase leading to Den's tomb, a concentration of pottery and other objects from the tomb of Djer was found, buried in three pits along with remains of wicker baskets and yokes, and covered by a layer of bricks (2003, 94-102) which appeared to be related to the Middle Kingdom deposit to the north of Den's tomb. To sum up this first phase, following on from the abandonment of Umm el-Qaab as the principal royal burial ground *c.*2643, the importance of the site as an active centre of cult declined, to the extent that some objects were freely removed from Djer's tomb and scattered on the ground nearby. I will return to the question of looting and 'treasure hunting' in Section 4.3.2 below. Other objects were removed and buried, possibly to make space within the tomb.

Two important parallels for the collection and redeposit of material in the early Dynastic period are the stone vessels inscribed for Anejib which were placed in Semerkhet's tomb at Umm el-Qaab (Petrie 1900, 20), and the thousands of stone vessels deposited in galleries beneath the Step Pyramid inscribed with the names of many First and Second Dynasty rulers (Lacau and Lauer 1959-61). Djer is among them, but not singled out in any way. These deposits fit well into the general conception of a commemoration of the past at Saqqara (Baines 1989, 134; Baud 2002), and perhaps an attempt to ensure the presence of dead kings in multiple locations (Wengrow 2006, 228).

At an undetermined date before the Middle Kingdom, the tomb was burned. Amélineau initially suggested that this was part of general Coptic destruction, but Petrie argued 'It is

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similar versions of such large flint knives were used in everyday tasks such as butchering and have been found in the Archaic town at Hierakonpolis' (1988, 105).

quite beside the mark to attribute this burning to the Copts' (1901, 9).[91] Petrie observed that the wooden floors of the royal tombs 'mostly remain quite uncharred' whereas those of Merneith and Semerkhet were burnt, and the walls 'seldom show any burning towards the bottom' (1900, 7). Furthermore, an architectural feature (described below) was added to the tomb long before the Coptic period, on top of the burnt surfaces. Petrie therefore proposed that the burning was an accident that occurred while runaway slaves or vagabonds were taking refuge there, using wood from the tomb to light fires which then got out of control (1900, 7). There is no evidence to support this colourful interpretation.

3.2.3.2 Change of protagonist

The next phase that can be identified begins at some point near to the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, when Djer's tomb was dramatically singled out, and identified as a cult site associated with the burial of the god Osiris.[92] It is not possible to even speculate about why Djer's tomb was selected, while that of Den was simply restored.[93] It is as though a new cult pattern emerged at these tombs, focusing on one tomb, while conserving and repairing others. The memory of the original occupant was not erased, but subsumed or overwritten.[94] Questioning the reasons for this transformation, Kaplony has raised the possibility that Osiris, in the form of 'Gott in der Sänfte', appeared for the first time

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[91] Amélineau attributed much of the destruction to the 6th century AD, correcting de Morgan's quote that he had attributed it to the *beginnings* of Christianity (1899, 73 and n. 3).

[92] Leahy points out that the misconception of a New Kingdom date for the identification of Djer's tomb with that of Osiris is still found in the literature (1989, 55).

[93] Baud and Etienne have suggested that the reign of Djer marked a turning point in the history of human sacrifice, or 'androctonie', after which it was gradually replaced with animal sacrifice, with an accompanying superposition of religious tenets: 'La designation des hommes comme "le bétail du dieu" masque peut être une ancienne réalité sacrificielle à laquelle s'est superposée la notion du dieu jouant le rôle de pasteur' (2000, 66).

[94] Compare with the use of anonymous, uninscribed ancestor busts (examples are known from Abydos), which Meskell suggests may have represented any male relative; she concludes, 'Some individuals are too important to forget and must be constantly rehabilitated, whereas others were gradually forgotten. In the main, most deceased individuals probably shifted from the realm of individuated ancestors to a general ancestry through time, from the sphere of particular memories to the universal otherworldly' (Meskell 2004, 84). Leahy argues differently – that Djer was completely forgotten, because 'The association of the tomb of Djer with Osiris would not have been possible if any clear recollection of who the owner of the monument actually was' (1989, 56-7). He takes a reductionist view of the selection of the site: 'The mental process involved was probably simple: Abydos was, according to myth, the burial place of Osiris, the Umm el-Qa'ab contained very ancient monuments, therefore Osiris' tomb had to be there' (57).

during Djer's reign, and of Djer himself, 'Wird er damit historisches Vorbild des menschengestaltigen Ahnenkönigs Osiris..?' (Kaplony 1975, 1109). If the latter were true, and it can only be a speculative inference, the reason Djer or his tomb was chosen is inaccessible, but the process and the fact that it happened is significant.[95] Probably during the Second Intermediate Period, the tomb was enriched with a black basalt sarcophagus depicting Osiris, generally referred to as the 'Bed' (Figure 36 below).

Figure 36 The 'Bed' of Osiris (Cairo JE 32090)

From Amélineau 1899, pl. III

[95] Amélineau mentions Maspero's 'belle invention' that there was a connection between the king's name Ouenephes and the Osirian epithet *Wn-nfr* (1911, 184).

He is shown in mummified form, wearing the white crown and holding the crook and flail, with Isis as a falcon hovering above (in fact perching on him) and two pairs of falcons in protective attitudes at his head and feet. The body rests on a bier formed by the bodies of two lions, on top of a rectangular base. It measures 1.7m in length, 0.87 m in height and width, and the weight of the object was estimated by Amélineau as about 7 tons (1911, 183). Fragments of this sarcophagus were found by Petrie scattered as far as 200m away to the south.

There has been considerable difficulty in dating this monument, due to the fact that the cartouches are almost illegible, and stylistic arguments have so far proved inconclusive. Amélineau, who discovered the 'Bed', suggested that it dated to the Old Kingdom, while Petrie thought that the sarcophagus dated to the 26th Dynasty or later, but having reviewed the evidence Leahy has convincingly argued for a Second Intermediate Period date (1977, 424-34; see now Ryholt 1997, 217). He observed that this attribution would mean that the Bed predates all the pottery offerings and most of the inscriptions, 'as one would expect since it symbolises the cause of the dedications' (433). An Osiris cult associated with Abydos can be securely dated back to the late Fifth Dynasty, for example using PT 1012d, where Osiris is he 'who stands unwearied in the midst of Abydos', or PT 1665a, where 'the name of Osiris flourishes in the Thinite nome' (Griffiths 1980, 126). In the Middle Kingdom, Abydos itself began to emerge as a national centre of Osiris worship, attested to by the performance of the Osiris rites and the erection of private stelae in the temple area, and cenotaphs between the temple and the cemetery. At Umm el-Qaab, the developing local cult of Osiris may thus have fused with an established but nebulous funerary cult of the early Dynastic kings, allowing one of their tombs to be 'usurped' for the god's sarcophagus. At some point, again unrecoverable, the cartouches on the Bed were deliberately erased, and unlike the parallel case cited by Leahy of the Abydene Second Intermediate Period Neferhotep boundary stela, which superimposes the name of one king over another, no further royal names were written over the original name (possibly Khendjer). A textual link with a historical personage is again severed, and

Khendjer (?), like Djer himself, faded into the background, while the role of the tomb as a focus of pilgrimage and commemoration of the king in the underworld continued.[96]

The other significant modification, assumed to relate to the cult of Osiris, is the addition of a stairway, built after the tomb was burned. Petrie destroyed this staircase 'in order to recover the earlier remains, including the beautifully engraved ivory box ... which was under the stairs' (1901, 9). The stairway was constructed of large black bricks, placed over small burnt red bricks, similar to those used in the rebuilt doorway of Den, which could point to a construction date as early as the Middle Kingdom. Situated in the northwest corner of the tomb, it gave access down into the central chamber. Notably, an undisturbed cache of vessels was found beneath the staircase, including nine imported jars from the Levant (Serpico and White 1996, 128), suggesting that part of the tomb's contents was respected and left deliberately *in situ* at this stage.

A parallel development in the Middle Kingdom occurred at Djer's funerary enclosure, where a number of small mudbrick shrines were built within the shrine after a deliberate levelling operation of the irregular ground surface (O'Connor 1989, 67).

During the 18th and 19th Dynasties, there is explicit evidence of historical enquiry carried out under the aegis of Tuthmosis III (at Karnak) and Seti I, for whom the Abydos king list was compiled (p. 141 above) in which Djer is mentioned. At the same time, the increasing presence of votive offerings at Djer's tomb and elsewhere in the cemetery shows conscious recognition of the importance of these early kings' tombs.[97] The scattered evidence for a historical consciousness of Djer, in the king lists, thus contrasts with the fact that his actual burial spot acquires a revised interpretation. As part of the Osiris cult, blue painted jars dating to the reign of Amenhotep II / III were heaped up over the tomb; from the 22nd to the 25th Dynasty broken jars accumulated in enormous numbers there, which led to the sobriquet 'mother of pots'.

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[96] Note that Khendjer was responsible for commissioning a restoration of the temple in Abydos itself, according to the stela of Amenisenb, Louvre, C12 (Kemp 1975, 32).
[97] Compare also Ramesses IV, investigating 'the annals of Thoth who is in the House of Life' on the Abydos stelae (p. 87 above).

The objects deposited at Djer's tomb, between the reigns of Amenhotep II (1453-1419) and Djedhor (/Teos, 362-360 BC), suggest a remarkable cast of visitors who wished to leave signs of their presence, and invoke the assistance or blessing of the god.[98] Prophets and priests of Osiris, such as Ahmosu and Iuiu, dedicated ushabtis in the 18th Dynasty. Vases with scenes of priests or mythological texts were left there in the 19th Dynasty (Figure 37 below); votive sarcophagi and offering tables, ostraca, Osiride statuettes were deposited in the tomb in a fairly regular pattern until the 26th Dynasty, after which there is something of a gap in the material record until the deposit of some Osiride statuettes of the Ptolemaic period. As with other pilgrimage destinations, like Saqqara, each offering was made in full awareness of the presence of previous offerings.

Figure 37 Terracotta vase dedicated to Osiris, by two Ramesside priests, Sawypaankh and Wenennefer, deposited in the tomb of Djer

One of five; the other four vases are in Cairo. E.0579, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels[99]

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[98] Listed as 'Finds of later date', Porter and Moss V 1937, 79. There is also a find of a sandstone fragment with a doubtful reading of the name Arsinoe (Naville 1914, pl 8, 14).
[99] Bibliography: Speleers 1923, 60, n° 251; Limme 1992, 34-35.

During Taharqa's reign in Dynasty 25 (690-664), graffiti etched into limestone boulders at the entrance to the wadi leading to Umm el-Qaab suggest that Montuemhat, Fourth Prophet of Amun, may have undertaken a formal inspection of the tombs at the same time that he renewed the sacred barque of Osiris at Abydos (Leclant 1961, 187; Peden 2001, 268). A further structural modification was made to the tomb in Dynasty 26, under Wahibre (Amasis, 589-570 BC); the priest Peftjau-herawy-Nit (see Section 2.4.4 above) describes a number of building projects he undertook at Abydos, which have been linked to this rebuilding phase (Jelinková-Reymond 1956). A chapel was built, of which a door jamb was found in the tomb of Merneith showing Apries offering wine to a god (Figure 38).

Figure 38 Door jamb from the 26th Dynasty chapel built at the tomb of Djer

From Petrie 1900, I, pl. xxxviii, 10, 11

All these offerings can be seen in the context of the general development of the Osiris cult, in which participation was extended from the Middle Kingdom onwards from royal to non-royal persons (Griffiths 1982, 627). Other manifestations of the cult that are relevant to the consideration of this tomb are certain practices relating to his role as a god of fertility, vegetation and resurrection, which have resonances in the use of tombs in the post-pharaonic period. Osiris became identified with germinating grain from the Middle Kingdom onwards, although there is important earlier evidence, such as at predynastic

Merimda where grain was strewn over the corpse, or the Second Dynasty grave at Saqqara which showed grain on an oblong litter of matting. Gradually, Osiris came to be associated with a wider variety of agricultural ceremonies and objects. The earliest Osiride figures referred to as 'corn mummies' date to the New Kingdom (Raven 1998; Centrone 2006), and continued to be made into the Roman period (Kurth 1998). In the Osirian festival of Khoiak, a mould in the shape of an Osiris-figure was filled with sprouting plants and placed in a trough called a garden (*ḥspt*; Chassinat 1966; Griffiths 1982, 630). At Umm el-Qaab, four 25th Dynasty deposits of offering vessels were found containing small branches, leaves and possibly sycamore seeds (Dreyer 2003, 138). The triumph of life over death, expressed through the metaphor of corn or other vegetation, fused ideas of fertility and immortality perfectly.

Thus far, I would argue that the reuse of the tomb of Djer, and that of a number of pharaonic monuments, should not be read as breaking any rules of respect or decorum. This runs parallel with the widely perceived norm of Egyptian anxiety about disturbing an intact burial. In a recent discussion of the phenomena of reuse, Baines and Lacovara described the widespread practice of interventions into earlier mortuary structures in terms of devaluation, exploitation, annexation and appropriation (2002, 18). This is congruent with Kemp's view of the Egyptian 'compromised attitude towards the sacred', mentioned above (1995, 38):

> Devaluing earlier mortuary structures - of whatever age - allowed them to be exploited as sources of construction materials, or parts of them could be annexed for use as they stood. Recycling of older mortuary monuments was common. Apart from inscriptions in tombs enjoining visitors not to damage them, no pressure to keep them inviolate is evident. From the Early Dynastic Period on, reuse in the necropolis varied from employing materials from structures that were perhaps falling into ruin, through taking stone from the tombs of unrelated people, to annexing parts of one complex for the next. Non-royal individuals of many periods also appropriated complete constructed tombs (Baines and Lacovara 2002, 18).

3.2.3.3 Memory of earlier or 'ancestral' kings

Figure 39 Selected kings at the Ramesseum

Relief from the east wall of the second court of the Ramesseum; line drawing from Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. From Sasson 1995, 694

It seems probable that among the elite, the memory of certain kings survived in some detail. Evidence supporting this includes firstly the creation and copying of king lists as discussed above, attested from the briefest bone labels, to the 'Chamber of the Ancestors' at Karnak. Interest in sequences of past kings is paralleled by the Late Period evidence for interest in priestly genealogies, seen in Herodotus' claims to have been shown statues of three hundred and forty-something generations of priests in the 6th-5th c BC,[100] and 330

[100] Herodotus II, 143; the Egyptian informants say that there was a king and a corresponding high priest for each generation. Moyer (2002) discusses the reasons for treating the Greek accounts with some credulity, e.g. the figure of the priest Basa (OIM 10729) with twenty six generations of ancestors, and Berlin 23673, which has sixty generations of a family of priests at Memphis.

kings listed in a written record,[101] and the priestly genealogies of the Ptolemaic period (Moyer 2002, 78 n. 47; Thompson 1990). Secondly, the selective depiction of royal predecessors, such as the reliefs on the walls of the Ramesseum (Figure 39 above). Thirdly, the re-use of either material goods or building materials 'belonging' to previous kings (see further Section 5.1 below). Goedicke has argued convincingly that the re-use of Old Kingdom stone by Amenemhet I at Middle Kingdom Lisht expressed a symbolic relationship with royal ancestors (1971). For example, a granite lintel which came from Khephren's monument at Giza was used to create Amenemhet's pyramid, and as Goedicke pointed out 'no utilitarian explanation seems to account for engaging in such a technically difficult task as transporting this great monolith to Lisht' (1971, 152). The pattern of referring to the past in a material language is demonstrable on a grand scale at Fourth Dynasty Saqqara, whether through a historicist use of ancient building materials, or the deposition of vast numbers of stone vases inscribed with ancestral kings' names (Baines 1989, 134; Goedicke 1971). One explanation that has been offered for the presence of this ancestral material is that it helped to legitimize Djoser's position and his exploitation of the labour force (Baines 1989, 134), but this interpretation cannot be applied to more modest re-uses of building materials found throughout Egyptian history.

Thus far the inscribed memory of individuals appears to principally serve the purposes of the elite group, although the wider community of workmen and administrators would have been aware of the strategy of acknowledging historical relationships or suggesting an 'affinity' (Goedicke's confessedly loose description) with an earlier king whenever one monument was depleted in order to create a new one. The *local* memory of certain Old Kingdom rulers buried at Saqqara persisted into the Middle Kingdom, seen in the texts of those professing to serve as their funerary priests, other references to these ancient kings as benefactors and intercessors in funerary invocations, and possibly basilophoric personal names, for example *Wnis-m-sȝ.f* and his family in the Twelfth Dynasty (Malek 2000; Moussa 1971). Malek sees this renewal (or continuation) of interest and veneration of ancestral kings coexisting with the dismantling and reuse of

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[101] Herodotus II, 100.

their funerary structures at Lisht and Mit Rahina as a 'contradictory' situation. I will return to the phenomenon of reuse in the concluding discussion of this dissertation, but would suggest here that there is no conflict between the two strategies.

The third category of evidence was mobilized through a wider social group, namely via literature and stories. Literary reputations adhered to certain kings who embodied stereotypical aspects of a ruler – the tyrant (Khufu, eg in Herodotus II, 122-137), the wise man (Menkaure, Hardjedef), the warrior/ hero (Tuthmosis II, Ramesses II).

The fourth type of evidence for the memory of ancestral kings has to be imaginatively reconstructed; this is the collective memory of the events that took place at Umm el-Qaab at the time of Djer's death. The trauma and theatre of the burial process in the First Dynasty, involving the interment of hundreds of members of the elite, would have lingered long in the minds of 'the privileged few who participated in such transactions and survived' (Wengrow 2007, 39). Furthermore, it is likely that a much wider community was affected by the spectacle of the funerary rites – those who carried out the sacrifices, who prepared and covered the graves, who made the objects for deposition, who were directly related to the victims, all those who perhaps watched either at close quarters or from the settlement. While each king remained the focus of the rite, hundreds, if not thousands, were drawn into the event, making it difficult to forget.[102] I would like to suggest that this memory of the interment of the First Dynasty kings was eventually converted into and commemorated by the performance of the Osiris mysteries by the Middle Kingdom.[103]

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[102] Taking the example of Djer's burial, more than 600 individuals were killed and buried at the combined sites of Umm el-Qaab and his funerary enclosure; out of the total population, estimated at *c.* 1 million, this represents 0.04% (using figures from Butzer 1976). This does not support the suggestion that the sacrificial burials made little impact upon the whole society, contra Baines: 'The numbers must have been small in relation to society as a whole, so that the practice's wider impact might not be great. Life was cheap in most pre-modern societies and this was a striking example of that cheapness' (1995, 137).

[103] Baud and Etienne suggest that the evidence suggesting extensive human sacrifice during the reign of Djer might be linked to the eventual selection of his tomb as that of Osiris: 'A titre d'hypothèse, on peut se demander si le choix de la tombe de Djer parmi les tombes thinites

The sacrificial event at Umm el-Qaab has been argued elsewhere to be evoked in the *sed*-festival rites (Helck 1987, Crubézy and Midant-Reynes 2000), Crubézy and Midant-Reynes commenting that its original significance was forgotten (38). At the climax of the *sed*-festival as depicted at Abu Ghurob and Bubastis, the king descends into a tomb: Uphill describes this as the 'supreme moment' of highly secret rites, and uses a scene on the roof of the tomb of Seti I at Abydos to suggest what took place:

> The lower register in this shows Seti dressed in a shroudlike garment (similar in form to the Sed festival robe [?]) stretched out on a bed ornamented with lion heads like the one shown in the Niuserre' scenes. The king has turned from his back, and the posture resembles that of a sphinx rather than a mummy or a dead person. A god presents to him the symbols of life, stability, and dominion, fixed at the end of a staff. The king's face is shown painted green because he was considered dead (Uphill 1965, 379).

If correctly reconstructed, this scene dramatised the process of *revivification* of the 'dead' king, rather than echoing the sacrifice of his retainers, and thus is closely paralleled in the performance of the annual Osiris mysteries. Connerton described the distinguishing feature of commemorative ceremonies being that they explicitly refer to prototypical persons and events (1989, 61); the Osirian rites explicitly refer to Osiris, prototype of dead king, but may look back to mortuary events of the First Dynasty. Comparable features of the Osiris rites and the interment of Djer include the deposit of 'Osiris' figures, and the burial of Djer's retainers; the importance of the king's and the god's body; and the centrality of the motif of death, symbolic in the case of Osiris, real in the case of Djer.

Where did Djer fit into these patterns of memory? His memory survives in the first category of evidence, the king lists, in the Berlin medical papyrus, and lastly in Manetho. He does not appear in the few pictorial accounts of former kings. He does survive as a quasi-literary or historical figure as the author of the medical treatise. However, the localised memory of Djer at his actual burial site seems to be lost, and transformed by the Middle Kingdom into the burial of an Ur-king, Osiris himself.

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d'Oumm el Gaab pour matérialiser la tombe du dieu Osiris à la fin de l'Ancien Empire (Amélineau 1899; Leahy 1977) ne renvoie pas au souvenir d'une telle pratique, souvenir qui se serait maintenu peut-être au travers des annales royales' (2000, 66).

Djer in turn assumed the distant significance of an archetypal wise king in Late Period memory, just as Imhotep became the archetypal intellectual and hence patron of intellectuals from the New Kingdom onward. Clearly Imhotep and Amenhotep son of Hapu answered deeper social needs than Djer, as Wildung has shown (1977), and thus enjoyed fully developed cults and were eventually deified. In cases of other rulers who were deified, it was expressed in a strongly local cult, 'often comparatively briefly, in a rather informal, unorganized cult' (Wildung, xiii; citing his earlier study, 1969, for Dynasties I through IV).

'The situation is wild and silent...' (Petrie 1900, 4).

In the Persian period (525-404 BC) 'interest in the site faded', and 'beyond a few stray scraps of Roman pottery and glass there is nothing later found here' (Petrie 1901, 7). This is a conventional assessment of a lack of monumental architectural works dating beyond the Late Period. In fact, with the notable exception of Amélineau (who was a Coptologist as well as an Egyptologist; Dawson and Uphill 1995, 13), it is principally the early excavators interest in the site that faded at the point of transition to the Roman period. I will argue that the evidence from the Tomb of Djer from the third to the sixth centuries AD is intimately connected with social developments in the town and hinterland, and that in various ways these express a commentary on and relationship with the traditional meaning of the site.

3.3 Coptic Abydos

'Christian Egypt shut the door upon the past and threw away the key' (Barns 1978, 20).

At first glance, Djer's tomb has limited material evidence associated with Coptic activity. While the temples in Abydos became strongly contested areas of spiritual control, activity at Umm el-Qaab itself seems to have diminished, the latest finds from there dating to the fourth or fifth century AD. Perhaps for the first time since the period between the Old and Middle Kingdoms, the site became as 'wild and silent' as Petrie found it at the end of the nineteenth century (1900, 4).

Figure 40 Head of Christ (?), drawn in charcoal on a cylindrical alabaster vase.

From Amélineau 1899, pl. 16

However, two significant finds at the tomb merit examination. A fragment of a cylindrical alabaster vase with a charcoal drawing of a bearded man, frontally orientated,[104] (Figure 40), was found in the chamber designated 'I' of the tomb of Djer (Figure 41). The style of the head suggests that it may represent either a saint, or Christ. The contrast between the monumental basalt sculpture of Osiris, and this roughly drawn sketch on an ostracon could not be more extreme, but it is the spontaneity of the drawing that is striking, and its deposition in this tomb. The image of one deity or sacred figure is drawn in the place of

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[104] Björkman (1984) took the view that frontality in Coptic art represents a two-dimensional translation of three-dimensional pharaonic sculptural conventions; this argument is particularly interesting given the proximity of the three-dimensional Osiris figures *in situ* at the tomb, i.e. the sarcophaghus and clay statuettes, and this drawing.

another. This drawing, together with further textual and archaeological evidence from the site, may exemplify a palimpsestual approach to the tomb.

Figure 41 Plan of the Tomb of Djer

Frontispiece from Amélineau 1899

Secondly, a sherd with the names Shenute, Paul, Victor and Demetrius was found on the mound: all names of well-known saints (1899, 19). There are a number of possible interpretations of this list; the most likely being that it is a list of the names of a group of Copts connected in some way with an activity at Umm el-Qaab, each named after these saints, written on a sherd for some practical purpose. Or it may be the kind of spiritual genealogy that was found in a Coptic cell high up in the wadi above Abydos – 'Apa Apollo, Apa Anoup, Apa P-hib, Apa Patermoute, Apa Isak (?), Apa Pshoï ... Apa Iohanes, Apa Iakob' (Petrie 1925, 24). Similar lists are a major feature of the inscriptions at the Osireion, which will be discussed below (Section 3.3.3). Both of these local examples of 'spiritual genealogies' or invocations tend to use the title 'Apa', and are found with further contextual information that suggests they refer to the saints themselves rather than their namesakes.

Other finds from the tomb dating to the Roman period include an oil lamp with an engraved Coptic letter 'M' (ⲙ) on the base (Figure 42 below), and an enormous cylindrical vase with the letters *t* – *ti* inscribed on it, at the bottom of one of the subsidiary tombs (Amélineau 1899, 19).

Figure 42 Roman lamp with Coptic letter inscribed

From Amélineau 1897-8, pl. XLIV, figs. 5 and 6

Amélineau interpreted all of these finds as evidence specifically associated with Coptic spoliation at Umm el-Qaab, and wove them into the story of Moses of Abydos, discussed below. There are two problems with this theory. Firstly, these finds would all need to fall into a very narrow date range at the turn of the fifth century. Secondly and more importantly, a lamp, a drawing, a storage jar, and the recording of names on a potsherd do not necessarily point to an episode of reckless destruction; they might equally suggest a Christian presence at the site, either of regular visitors or even residents.

These finds prompt three initial questions: what evidence is there for other patterns of Christian activity at Abydos, to which these finds can be related; what was the relationship at Abydos between certain local saints, or Jesus himself, and Osiris, and lastly, can a relationship be identified between Christian and pagan in the context of the biography of the tomb?

3.3.1 Reoccupation of tombs, living with the dead

The idea of living in a tomb is a striking innovation of the Coptic period in Egypt.[105] The act of choosing to *live* in a place destined for the dead has given rise to an elaborate and nebulous explanatory model of vandalism, appropriation, numinosity and continued sacredness (most recently Rassart-Debergh's formulation of simultaneous 'sacralité continue' and 'exorcisme'; 2004, 307[106]). 'Continued sacredness' alludes to the new use of a site which benefits in a general way from the fact that it was formerly sacred, and 'exorcism' refers to the intended effect of replacing one religion with another. Traditionally, textual evidence from the *Life* of St Antony has been used to argue that Coptic occupation of tombs seems to take place from at least the late 3rd century onwards.[107] The *Life* places Antony's first withdrawal to the tombs *c*.271 AD, when he sold his possessions to live as an ascetic near his village in the Fayum; *c*.285 he entered the deserted fortress, which he left *c*.305. Notably, this precedes the major persecutions of 311-313, although it is also true that the tombs provided a place of refuge during the early years of Christianity before it was a made a *religio licita* in 314. The hagiographic tradition emphasizes the principle of *anachoresis*, withdrawal and distancing oneself from the world, as the reason for living in the desert, which in practice often meant the same as the tomb. Brown has suggested that early Egyptian ascetics were 'men who found themselves driven into the desert by a crisis in human relations' (1978, 82; for a critique of Brown's emphasis on the tensions of village life lying behind the flight of ascetics to the desert, see Gould 1993). The experience of actually being alone in the cell was of central importance in developing the spiritual self, and when that cell was a pharaonic

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[105] The concept of the tomb as house is in some sense embedded in its architecture (Scharff 1947), see for example the Second Dynasty tombs at Saqqara imitating houses (Grajetski 2003, 12).
[106] This important article provides an up-to-date survey of Christian reoccupation of pharaonic tombs and temple sites, but it does not differentiate between very different types of re-use, nor address the question of the reasons for such reoccupation.
[107] Paul of Thebes' occupation of a tomb (Badawy 1953, 1) appears to predate Antony's by approximately twenty years, according to Jerome's *Life of Paul*, but this may be simply an attempt to invent a saint who outshines Antony (Harmless 2003, 422). The tomb Paul chose is said by Jerome to have been 'a secret factory for minting money at the time when Antony was having an affair with Cleopatra' (White 1988, 77).

tomb this included an acute awareness of the past: 'Go and sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything' (Moses the Black, in Gould 1993, 150).[108]

Female asceticism tended to be practised in less solitary conditions than male asceticism. Two exceptions to this rule are the sixth century Syncletica of Palestine (Vivian 1996), who lived in the desert for twenty-seven years, and Alexandra who immured herself in a tomb just outside Alexandria (Elm 1994, 319, in Palladius, *HL* 5).[109] In the few cases of female *anachoresis*, the need to pray conflicted with the requirements of marriage, so escaping marriage has been proposed as the main reason for aristocratic flight to the desert by some scholars (Vivian 41-2).

While attempts have been made to trace the practice of *anachoresis* to the garden of Ptolemagrius at Panopolis, or the recluses (*katochoi*) of Serapis (Badawy 1978, 35), and to link monastic fraternities with the Therapeutae of Alexandria (Rousseau 1985, 12), the most convincing antecedent remains the exercise of the funerary cult at the tomb by the funerary priest in the pharaonic period (O'Leary 1942, 318; Griffiths 1985, 27 n. 13). Looking beyond the hagiographical sources, the *practice* of an individual living for periods of time at a rock-cut tomb, and visited by supporters bringing supplies, is clearly part of a centuries old practice. On a wider scale, the long history of visits to the necropolis to supply the dead with food and drink by their family, now reformulated as supplying the ascetic with food, again suggest a deeply ingrained habitus at work.[110] An echo of this formulation is seen in the Muslim tradition of twelve ascetics living in the cemetery of the Gebel al-Muqattam, related by Ibn al-Zayyat (d. 1412; in Taylor 1999, 90; 130). A 10th century holy man, Shaykh Abu al-Hasan ibn al-Fuqa'i (d. 964) joins this group who rely on the power of prayer to obtain food: twelve loaves and a fish

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[108] Gould interprets this saying to mean 'that the answer to temptation will be found in the cell or it will not be found at all' (1993, 151).
[109] There are 120 fathers listed in the *Apophthegmata*, and only three mothers: Theodora, Syncletica and Sarah, who may have also have been an anchorite (see Ward 1985; Harmless 2003, 440-457). Harmless notes that women's asceticism in Egypt is probably underreported (2003, 445).
[110] Badawy notes that the village of Rifa is inhabited in the present day by villagers living in remodelled rock-cut tombs set into the cliff (1978, 35). See also Frankfurter's use of the concept of the habitus in redefining syncretism (2003, 384).

miraculously appear each night. Abu al-Hasan is sent away from their company when he desires and is given additional salt. The story underscores the value placed on ascetic denial in the Islamic tradition, and surely looks back at the practice of Christian ascetic life in the tombs, whose occupants were fed by divine intervention, in reality by friends, relatives or supporters carrying food and water up to the tombs.[111]

Were there economic reasons for living in tombs? Getting into debt provoked many poor Egyptians, not necessarily Christians, to run away, whereupon they were placed onto the register of 'those who had fled (*anakechōrēkotes*)' (Bowman 1986, 117). Long before such a register was introduced, it has been argued that the texts suggest that a similar kind of *anachoresis* was taking place in the early Twelfth Dynasty (Posener 1975; Caminos 1992, 22).[112] A passage in the New Kingdom text known as 'A Tale of Woe' (*P. Moscow* 127) may allude to this:

> 'They are neglecting the ⌜*m*⌜*m*-grain; I don't know whether they are abandoning even the plough-land, (5,1) and there is no way of restraining them. I said to myself: 'Let the sparrows do away with the remnant of the ⌜*m*⌜*m*-grain, (5,2) and let me be rid of the tax and the staff, which inflicts suffering to excess'.
>
> (Caminos 1977, 45).

The Roman period fugitives are hard to identify in the archaeological record, and no other evidence specifically connects them with tomb dwelling. It is reasonable to assume that this phenomenon did sometimes occur, not just because the tombs were somewhere to hide but also because they appear to have been cost-free. Wipszycka has shown that the sale of land in the gebel, the desert fringes, seems to have taken place in a number of

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[111] Ascetic practice continued among Islamic saints in Egypt, as Lane noted in the 19th century: 'Some welees renounce the pleasures of the world, and the society of mankind; and, in a desert place, give themselves up to meditation upon heaven, and prayer; depending upon divine providence for their support: but their retreat becomes known; and the Arabs daily bring them food' (1860, 231).

[112] Caminos takes the view that the ancient peasant's life was essentially difficult and unhappy, prompting escape: 'When excessive fiscal demands, constant requisitions for corvée service, ruthless masters, miserable wages, and appalling living conditions became intolerable, the peasant, in utter despair, would lay down his tools, forsake family, home, and field, and run away' (1997, 22).

cases from the end of the sixth century to the mid-ninth century ((2004*a*), but we do not have direct evidence of the sale of specific tombs. The papyrological evidence relates to land surrounding the monastery of Phoibammon, Hawara, and a dwelling within the monastery of Bawit, rather than to tombs forming part of a *laura* or semi-anchoretic community. It is therefore safest to assume that occupation of tombs in the Coptic period conformed to a general principle of squatter's rights – that they were free of charge, were not subject to ownership or bequests, and that the anchorites had 'possession' of them based on custom.

In addition to being economically attractive, the practicality of well-built, ready-made structures has been given considerable prominence in the literature on Coptic re-occupation of dynastic tombs. Thus at Epiphanius, the earliest occupant of Daga's tomb is described as a canny house-hunter: 'The subterranean corridor and the square chamber inside were features which attracted the first anchorite, and with no great effort he could clear out the little rubbish which had accumulated within them. His next thought would be to utilize the ruined portico...' (Winlock and Crum 1926, 29). There are arguments for and against the attractiveness of living in a disused tomb, whether on the Theban mountain or in the cemeteries of Abydos, but they have tended to dominate discussion of this practice, to the exclusion of its symbolic aspects.

Down the hill from Umm el-Qaab, in the town beyond the main temple of Osiris, Copts moved into a number of tombs (Coquin, Martin and Grossmann 1991*a*). In Cemetery D, Peet's excavations revealed two 18th Dynasty tombs that had been specially converted during the Coptic period, and Droop identified these conversions as chapels (Peet 1914, 49-53). In Tomb D68, a mudbrick staircase paved in limestone was added to the tomb entrance shaft (recalling the staircase at Djer's tomb), a wooden door was inserted into the entrance to the tomb chamber, the interior completely plastered with mud and then whitewashed, and a series of niches cut into the coating. Tomb D69, which originally had two vaulted chambers on either side of a central shaft, received similar preparatory treatment, but here the new white interior surfaces were decorated (Figure 43).

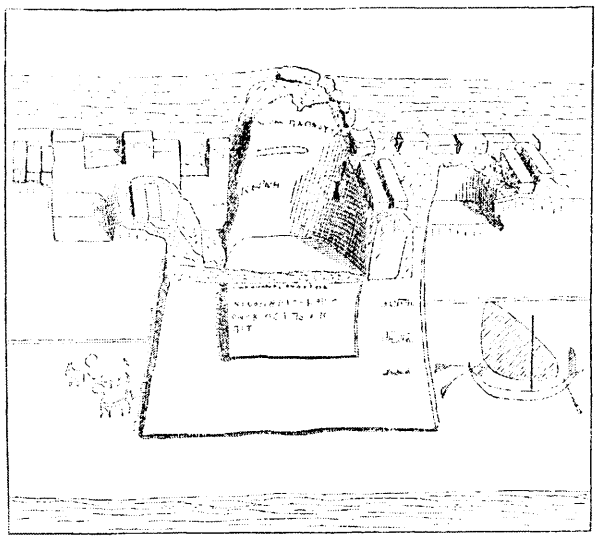

Fig. 17. Drawing of east wall of D 69. Scale $\frac{1}{20}$.

Figure 43 Drawing of east wall of Tomb D69, Abydos, showing position of graffiti (Figure 44 and Figure 45)

From Peet 1914, fig. 17

Inscriptions, in red and black letters, refer to Apa Thomas, the man of God, papa Serne, and possibly the writer himself, Isaac (Peet 58).

There are also images: three lions or desert animals (Figure 44), and a sailing ship (Figure 45). The ship or bark in Christian Egypt is one of the most secure examples of conscious quoting of earlier iconography – its role in dynastic Egypt as the bark in which the deceased travels towards rebirth transitioned smoothly into a range of similar Christian meanings: 'la barque permet de traverser la mer tumultueuse de la vie et d'arriver à bon port: la vie éternelle; l'Église est également souvent associée à un bateau dont la croix est le mât ou l'ancre' (Rassart-Debergh 2004, 306).[113] Here at Abydos, the ship also resonated as a symbol of pilgrimage to the city of Osiris; the image of a ship carrying the deceased to and from Abydos was 'the most commonly depicted nautical ritual' in tomb paintings (Vinson 1994, 50). In Tomb D69, the ship looks back at the past, but may speak of the Christian journey of the soul in which the ascetic himself is identified with the vessel.

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[113] See also Rassart-Debergh 1992 and 1995.

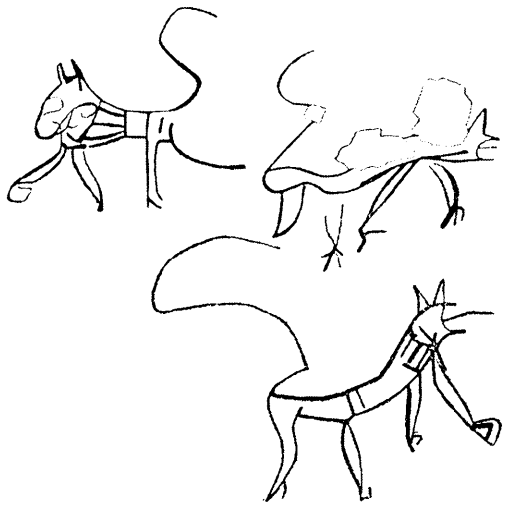

Figure 44 Lions or desert animals in Tomb D69, Abydos

From Peet 1914, fig. 18

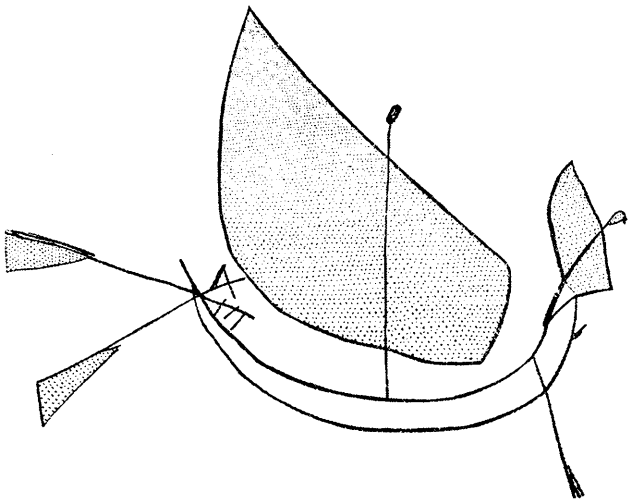

Figure 45 Boat in Tomb D69, Abydos

From Peet 1914, fig. 19

The 'lions' or desert animals belong to the category of Coptic tomb painting generally regarded as 'folk art', in the same way as the animal drawings in a tomb near Sohag are characterised as 'intrusive sketches occasionally daubed on the walls of his cell by some monk ignorant in the art of painting' (Badawy 1978, 247). Like the head of Christ on the ostracon at Umm el-Qaab (Figure 40, p. 162 above), the choice of media and sketchy quality of these superimposed images should not lead to them being dismissed so easily.

Studies of St Antony's struggle with demons during his period of withdrawal in the tombs have explored the possibility that these demons may have been the gods of ancient Egypt as well as Graeco-Roman imports (Frend 1974, 26). Griffiths developed this idea further to suggest that the demons may have been Sethian enemies: 'The tomb, therefore, although situated in the desert, was an enclave sanctified and fortified against the intrusions of Seth and his followers, who were believed to have the power of transforming themselves into various animals and monsters' (1985, 26).

Following Griffiths, the desert animals in Coptic tomb painting may reflect ideas taken from dynastic Egypt about Sethian enemies in the form of animals, which became a category of 'demons' threatening the ascetic. This conflict fits into Frankfurter's model of the power struggle holy men engaged in: 'Indeed, enough holy men are picked out in the literature for their exorcistic powers that we can conclude, if not a general preoccupation with demons among Egyptian monks, that the regional reputations of many holy men arose from their abilities to define and combat demonic threats' (2003, 359). The process of achieving victory or mastery over such demons for the Christians of late antique Abydos was extremely slow and drawn out, as will be seen in the story of Moses. In these wall paintings in a reoccupied tomb, the fantastic animals juxtaposed with a ship may dramatize the soul under threat.[114]

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[114] Rassart-Debergh (1992, 55-74; 69-71) has convincingly argued this interpretation of the boat motif in Christian art, using a number of textual sources from the Apophthegmata Patrum in which the metaphor of the ship at sea besieged by demons is used explicitly to represent the monk struggling against Satan.

Figure 46 Graffiti from Kellia of warrior, ship, monstrous animal, snake and date palm, in Building 57, 72, Qouçour 'Isâ, the 'House of Boats'; 6th - 7th c AD

From Rassart-Debergh 1992, pl. VI, a

There are examples of Coptic graffiti combining words and images which do not necessarily conform to the interpretation that they are a reflection of spiritual crisis. Out in the oasis at Kharga, in one of the tombs in the Coptic cemetery of Bagawat (T 20), there is a text accompanying drawings of ships and crosses (Cruz-Uribe, Piccione, and Westerfeld 2004, 43; 46). It gives a surprising explanation for the graffiti:

'I, Panare,
together with Psate: We visited
this(?) place, fleeing on account of Aporre,
since he is pursuing us on account of this hostility of (in) the
towns (?), since we caught him stealing from the garden.
We beat him and we fled. We spent a day
in this place.'

(Bagawat - Tomb 20 - North Wall - Field #1)

As the preliminary analysis of the texts points out, the two men were lying low for the day, having witnessed a robbery in the town. Panare passed the time by teaching Psate how to write his name, and one or both of them carved a series of drawings on the wall of the tomb. It shows an interesting combination of devout imagery (the crosses, and arguably the boats) and disregard for the solemnity of its meaning.

Returning to Tomb D69 in Abydos, the choice of furnishing is of even greater interest than the graffiti. Pegs, possibly coat hooks or lamp holders, were made out of human thigh-bones, sunk into the plaster at right angles. While one must ask whose bones these were before attempting to interpret their significance – did they belong to the original tomb occupants, were they chosen at random from the thousands of skeletal remains crammed into this burial area, or were they those of a member of the Coptic community? – clearly an important statement is being made about attitudes towards the body and death. If these converted tombs are really chapels, the deliberate use of human bones embedded in the architecture may suggest a recognition of the purpose of the place – its proximity to death and deposition of the body, and of the underlying sacredness of the cemetery. This interpretation coexists with the apparently 'disrespectful' act of clearing out the buried bodies, redecorating the tomb space, and using the tomb for either devotional activity or as a habitation. In fact, it conforms to the same pattern seen at the tomb of Djer, where, in the Middle Kingdom, the original burial material is removed, a staircase is built to enable regular access to the tomb; changes are made to the interior, and attention is drawn to a 'body'.

These Abydene tombs in Cemetery D may be compared with a Ramesside tomb in the Valley of the Queens such as Nebettawy's (QV 60), where the Coptic occupant(/s) was in direct contact with the texts, images, and goods of the pharaonic past, and chose to apply a coat of plaster in the first room and either leave the other parts of the tomb alone or simply paint a red cross above the entrances (Lecuyot 1993, 269; Leblanc and Hassanein 1989, pl. 147, 148).[115] The phenomenon of *damnatio memoriae* was intermittently practised in the pharaonic period; Akhenaten's boundary stela states of its message: 'It shall not be scratched out, it shall not be washed off, it shall not be hacked out, it shall not be washed over with gypsum-plaster' (Murnane and Van Siclen III, 1993). In the context of Coptic reoccupation of tombs, a coat of gypsum plaster is usually interpreted as the primary act of transforming a tomb into a dwelling, but the fragments of bone, wrappings and cartonnage, often scattered surprisingly near the entrance of a tomb, are a reminder of

[115] In many cases the pharaonic burial would have already been seriously disturbed, but it may not have been until the Coptic phase of use that mummies were scattered outside tombs.

the new occupant's first act – literally throwing out his or her predecessor. At the same time, continuity is clearly evident in the practice of bringing food to the tomb, now for the living ascetic rather than the dead relative or patron. Two encounters between Coptic Egyptians and the pharaonic dead, from hagiographic literature, throw light on how this relationship was framed in a literary context: the story of Pisentius, and the poem of the mummy (*'Ich ging des Wegs...'*, in Junker's translation; 1908, 223).

Pisentius, the sixth century bishop of Coptos, whose *Life* is preserved in several Coptic accounts purportedly written shortly after his death (Amélineau 1887; 1889; Budge 1913; Westerfeld 2003), is depicted in conversation with a mummy as they share the tomb space in which Pisentius and his companion John have taken refuge.The Bohairic *Life* tells a dramatic story of their flight from the path of the invading Persians, and their retreat to the gebel above 'the mountain of Jeme' in Thebes, where they struggle with diminishing supplies of food and water. A further flight three miles into the desert (echoing the classic pattern of Antony's journey from the outer to the inner desert) takes them to a massive rock-cut tomb, filled with undisturbed burials and a roll of parchment giving all the names of the deceased, which Pisentius manages to read. John leaves to fetch their supplies, and on returning finds Pisentius listening to a mummy's plea. The mummy states that it is descended from a Greek family with Greek names, who were worshippers of pagan gods in Armant, and it begs Pisentius to intercede with God to help it escape the tortures of 'Amenti'; the mummy then returns to its coffin, and the two companions eventually return to Coptos.

Many elements of this story have occasioned debate, chiefly as to whether the roll of names was written in Greek or Coptic – if Coptic, then this text is used as evidence for Coptic still being read and understood in the seventh century. Butler, however, who discusses the story of Pisentius at length, was interested only in the 'historical' elements of the account, - how far the Persian advance could be mapped, and the antipathetic attitude of the Copts towards the Persians, which contradicts the widely-held view that the Copts welcomed them as deliverers (1978, 81 n. 2; 81-89).

I suggest that the story incorporates a mummy of Greek family in order to dramatize the Greek-Persian conflict, extending this opposition beyond life into death, and positioning Pisentius as the mediator who can resolve social and religious differences according to the same script followed by Moses, Shenute and most other holy men of Christian Egypt. However, the key elements of the Pisentius story in terms of what it tells us about Christians and tomb dwelling are the idea that the interloper can greet and communicate with the dead, that the dead assume a supplicatory attitude, and that having awoken they return meekly to their coffins. All potential conflict arising from appropriation of the tomb is denied, and the newcomer is characterized as a powerful source of aid to the dead.[116]

A similar picture of Christian 'assistance' to the pharaonic dead can be seen in a 10th century Sahidic poem:

'I went to walk upon the road,
I found a body, bandaged, dead.
I cut its bonds; it said to me,
"I've come to thee, my holy Father,
That thou explain me in thy wisdom"'

(trans. Worrell 1945, 43; text published in Erman 1897, 35-6).

Again, the mummy can speak, and again, it wants help – this time, an explanation of the problem of mortality. These Coptic literary sources appear to suggest that the benefits of encountering the pharaonic dead accrued exclusively *to the mummies,* while in reality Copts occupied their tomb spaces, used their bodies as building materials as noted above, or even sometimes for medical treatments (El Daly 2005, 96).[117]

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[116] *Setna I* contains a similar message of the benefits brought by living visitors to the dead.
[117] The oldest reference El Daly has found to the association between mumiya and dead bodies in the Arabic sources dates to the mid-tenth century (2005, 97), but he suggests (105) that the idea of making use of dead bodies goes back to the pyramid texts (PT 273-4, the 'Cannibal Hymn').

Clearly this phase of the biography of tombs shows that ideas of who was alive and who was dead, and regarding mortality itself, were being interrogated and negotiated. Brown offered the interpretation of the ascetic being technically '"dead" to the world', in his discussion of some minimally-furnished remote Christian dwellings outside Esna, which were purpose-built cells rather than ex-tombs (1989, 252).[118] The act of living in a tomb intensifies and extends the metaphor.

Other small Coptic dwellings, probably hermitages, were made in cavities in the walls of the Shunet el-Zebib, and in caves in a narrow wadi in the cliffs behind Abydos. There in the Darb al-Jir, a carefully adapted monk's cell was constructed in a natural limestone cave, the principal phase of occupation of which was dated to the 5th-6th c by Hilda Petrie who cleared and copied it (1922/25, 20-26). Mena the Little chose to paint black crosses, doves carrying olive branches and backward-looking horned animals (Figure 48);[119] there are no ships here, far from the river and the temples of Osiris. Petrie remarked upon the abundance of pegs and hooks in the dwelling: she found thirty-nine in total, of flint or bone, and was able to identify the device for suspending the central lamp as an ox bone.

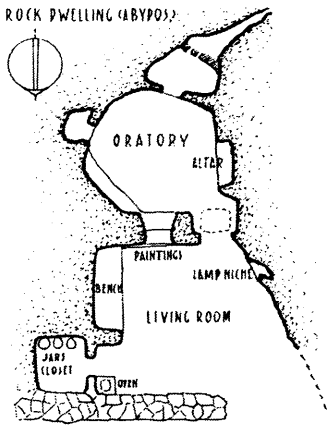

Figure 47 Mena's hermitage in a wadi at Abydos

From Badawy 1978, fig. 2.6

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[118] The hermitages were published by Sauneron and Jacquet (1972).
[119] Hilda Petrie suggested these were unicorns (1925, 22); I would again suggest desert animals, most likely gazelles. A number of inscriptions (mostly prayers and invocations) were also painted on the walls.

Figure 48 Decoration of Mena's dwelling at Abydos

These graffiti were located in an inner chamber of the hermitage, over the door leading to the 'oratory'.
From H Petrie 1925, pl. 52

These anchoretic dwellings in tombs at Abydos seem minimal compared with the mass inhabitation of the Theban mountain, or at Beni Hasan and Speos Artemidos (Rassart-Debergh 2004; Coquin and Martin, 1991; Badawy 1953). Coptic literary sources attest to the strength of pagan cult in Abydos, and so it is not surprising that there was only limited anchoretic settlement, together with literary references to the existence of monasticism in the Abydos area no earlier than the fifth century. These are first found in the *Life* of the martyr monks Panine and Paneu, followed by much greater detail afforded by the Life of Moses of Abydos, who was born *c.*466 and died in the mid sixth century. Petrie believed that the Tomb of Djer had been 'especially despoiled by the Copts in erasing the worship of Osiris' (1901, 8). The sources on Moses tell us more about how that happened, and bring us a little closer to the reasons why.

3.3.2 Moses – linking Umm el-Qaab, the temples, monasteries and tomb dwellers

Moses of Abydos plays a pivotal role in the process of Christianization at Abydos. His use of the 'mountain', his actions upon the temples, and his foundation of monasteries and convent had a profound effect on the transmission of ideas and behaviour from pagan to Christian Abydos. Like Shenute, his predecessor, he was an interventionist, reconfiguring the sacred spaces in the town while respecting their tenacity. The sources show him confronted with Bes, Apollo, and a range of unnamed demons; with priests from the temples, and angry townspeople. But Moses also included the ancient tombs in his plan of action at Abydos, above all on the 'mountain of Ebot'.[120] Shenute announced Moses was born there; Macrobius, Moses' disciple, said that Moses used to retire to the 'mountain of Ebot', and that he eventually died there (Coquin 1986, 5; 9-10). In the late fifth and early sixth centuries, Moses' encounters with the townspeople indicate that Christianity faced considerable challenges at Abydos to become the dominant faith. What can be seen in the following episodes is that the Copts recognized the numinous qualities

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[120] While the mountain, ⲧⲟⲟⲩ (Crum 1939 440b) has a variety of meanings dependent on context, Coquin suggests that 'montagne' here means 'desert': 'la montagne, ce qui dans la langue copte, comme dans le contexte géographique de Haute Égypte, désigne le désert' (Coquin 1986, 11). Al Maqrizi preserves the tradition that Moses was born at al-Balyana.

of the traditional sacred spaces, and their chosen strategy was to superimpose their own authority at these places through 'purification'.

To clarify the way Christian holy men and their followers thought about purification of ancient holy places, it is useful to consider a text from the White Monastery library that speaks about cleansing and replacement, promising the end of sacrifices to Satan (meaning Egyptian or Greek gods):

> 'Thus then at the site of a shrine to an unclean spirit, it will henceforth be a shrine to the Holy Spirit. And at the site of sacrificing to Satan and worshipping him and fearing him, Christ will henceforth be served therein, and He will be worshipped, bowed down to and feared. And where there are blasphemings, it is blessings and hymns that will henceforth be therein' (*P. Mich. MS* 158; Young 1981, 353).

Moses may even have known this text, and the actions he took at places densely populated by 'unclean spirits' at Abydos undoubtedly indicate that he had absorbed its lesson, namely that these places *must* be reorientated.

In relation to the tomb of Djer, Moses' *Life* attests to the fact that during his lifetime 'sacrifices', in other words rites of some kind, were still taking place at Umm el-Qaab.[121] This emerges from the story of his flight to 'the mountain' of Ebot. From there, his efficacious prayers brought down five temples in total, killing twenty-three priests in the 'Temple of Apollo' alone: the *Life* comments, 'et pas un homme ne recommença **à faire des réunions à la montagne d'Ebot pour faire des sacrifices** jusqu'à ce jour, parce qu'étaient morts ceux qui les trompaient...' (Amélineau 1899, 17, emphasis added). Whether or not the practice of 'meeting on the mountain' ceased as definitively as this source claims, the specificity of the geography of Moses' *Life* supports the possibility that this (admittedly normative) text reflects the historical fact of the maintenance of cult activity, at a location most likely identifiable with Umm el-Qaab.[122]

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[121] Texts and translations: Amélineau 1888/95, 680-706; Till 1936, 46-81.

[122] While Amélineau's excavations of Umm el-Qaab were undoubtedly flawed, the interest he took in the Coptic phases of the site was unmatched by other archaeologists, and he alone was able to make connections with textual sources such as the *Life* of Moses, to the point of

Another fragment of the *Life* suggests that Moses and the brothers had taken up temporary residence 'on the mountain', when an angel advises thus: "Maintenant donc ne le change pas le lieu (de résidence), car **le Seigneur purifiera cette montagne impure** par son entremise" (1899, 75, emphasis added). The Arabic Synaxarion from the local convent of Moses describes Moses killing the 'Satans of the holy mountain', '"qui fut rendue digne que tu habitasses en elle"' (1899, 76). Taken together with the fragment highlighted above, the textual and archaeological sources suggest the following scenario: Umm el-Qaab was still attracting adherents to pagan religion in the fifth century, who met on the hill and enacted certain rites there including acts of sacrifice. Coptic ascetics penetrated this sacred site, either over a period of time or on one occasion. This created considerable tension between the monks and the non-Christians in the town, leading to a sustained and perhaps violent conflict. The Copts won this spiritual and material conflict, and came to dominate Umm el-Qaab and to repress the expression of the cult of Osiris, replacing him either in small things like an image of Christ, or in large things by shifting the focus of attention to Moses. The mountain was 'purified'.

The tradition of interpreting the myth of Osiris in the light of the story of Jesus took place far away in the high cultural circles of Alexandria, in the writings of Clement, Origen and Ambrose of Milan. In certain local circles, there is evidence that demonstrates the occasional direct transfer of symbolism from Osiris to Christ, such as Cannuyer's study of the iconography of the pelican (1997),[123] but the stronger connection observable at Abydos is between Osiris and the local saint – Moses.

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interviewing the superior of the convent and checking the local Synaxare abridged version against the Coptic version. His identification of the 'montagne' with Umm el-Qaab has never been challenged, and seems plausible.

[123] Cannuyer shows how an Egyptian interpretation of the self-sacrificing pelican in the second century *Physiologus* almost certainly came from a similar pelican motif in the Pyramid Texts; the gap of eighteen centuries is filled only with a 3rd-4th c bronze ring found in Akhmim showing the pelican feeding its fledglings. He acknowledges the problem this presents, and how we are obliged to resort to explanations such as the hazards of loss, or that certain elements of symbolic thought existed only in oral popular culture (1997, 237). For a broader comparison of structural parallels between Osiris and Christ, see Bonnel and Tobin 1985.

Abydos thus seems to furnish evidence for the kind of transmission of behaviour that occurred when there was significant contact between Christian and pagan. While there may or may not have been 'a pagan lurking under every bed in the Panopolite nome', (from Smith's critique of Frankfurter's interpretations of Besa's *Life* of Shenute),[124] at Umm el-Qaab there were Egyptian, not Greek, pagans openly performing rites. Turning now to the Osireion, the mortuary temple of Seti I, these rites may be related to patterns of activity in the temples, revealing the greater adaptability of the temple environment to political and religious change.

3.3.3 The palimpsest of the Osireion and Temple of Seti I

> Basically, then, the Arab conquest of Egypt in A.D. 640-41 made no real difference with regard to the ancient monuments. They had been pagan abominations to the Christians; they became pagan abominations to the Muslims (Wilson 1964, 4).

The rich visual evidence at the Osireion and Temple of Seti I includes graffiti from the Third Intermediate Period (Gunn in Frankfort 1933, 87-96; Peden 2001, 266-7), stretching beyond the Arab conquest into the tenth century. Much of the Coptic graffiti had faded to invisibility in the twenty years between Whittemore studying them and Piankoff's publication in 1958. Probianus comments on an incubation oracle in a third century AD graffito; a Christian female martyr is drawn near a vignette from the Book of Caverns. While the Temple is often spoken of as being abandoned in fourth century (O'Leary 1938, 51[125]), in fact it clearly continued in use; in theory anyone could read the superimposed texts and images of Christians, Greeks and Egyptians on the walls

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[124] Smith challenges Frankfurter's interpretation of the story of villagers fighting over a piece of wood, which Frankfurter describes as 'most likely a reference to an Egyptian religious image and the object (along with its devotees) of a local iconoclastic movement' (1998, 79), which Smith responded to thus: 'To see in his [Besa's] remarks a reference to an idol would only occur to someone who was obsessed with the need to find a pagan lurking under every bed in the Panopolite nome' (2002, 247). While it is often hard to infer from hagiographies who the pagans are, how many of them there are, and what exactly they are doing, Smith's negative assessment of Frankfurter's approach is not supported by the evidence from Abydos.

[125] O'Leary claimed a general abandonment of temples in the 4th century, followed by a gap until as late as the 6th century when churches or monasteries began to be constructed within their walls.

themselves.[126] What is interesting is the change of use, which does not fit Wilson's expression of the long-held tenet among historians: that the ancient temples were universally viewed as pagan abominations.

The Osireion lies beside and to the south of the large temple whose construction was begun by Seti I, and completed by Ramesses II. Previous suggestions of a much earlier date for the Osireion have largely been rejected (David 1973). The relationship between and purpose of the two buildings seems to be one of mortuary temple and tomb, with the Osireion 'tomb' represented by the cenotaph of Seti I in his role of the deceased king as Osiris. In the temple, through a small chapel dedicated to Osiris, the visitor passes into the so-called 'Osiris complex' running the whole width of the temple. The Osireion lies close by, with its unique design of a tree-covered island surrounded by water, surrounded by subterranean chambers approached via a long sloping corridor. By the 19th Dynasty when these were built, the tradition of building royal cenotaphs at Abydos had been in place since the Middle Kingdom, the celebration of the 'mysteries' of Osiris already had a five hundred year history,[127] and the associated pilgrimage to Abydos was well established.

Thus far I have alluded to aspects of what may be termed 'pilgrimage' in the pharaonic period. In Volokhine's recent synthesis of 'pious displacements' in pharaonic Egypt, he problematises the category of pilgrimage, and defines it as 'voyage et motivation religieuse du voyage (ou lors du voyage), lieu sacré vers lequel on se rend, démarche individuelle ou collectif' (1998, 53). The phenomenon of significant numbers of people ritually visiting a sacred place is significant; at Abydos there was always a core of local participants, swelled during various periods by pilgrims coming from further afield. These pilgrims streamed into Abydos for a variety of religious and social purposes. Some came to set up personal memorial chapels along the processional route to Umm el-Qaab, which were reused for other burials over time (Simpson 1974, 6), while others came to participate in the processions during festivals. They visited the tomb of the Osiris at Umm

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[126] Or even the actual texts of Strabo describing the Well in the Osireion (*Geography* 17.1.42), or the 'destruction' of the temple by Moses in the *Life*.
[127] As for example evidenced by the Middle Kingdom Stela of Ikhernofret (Berlin Museum 1204; Schäfer 1902).

el-Qaab, and the temples in order to supplicate, receive healing, seek guidance through incubation, and invoke protection. Here I use 'pilgrims' in its widest sense, to include local ritual visitors rather than to refer exclusively to long-distance travellers.

Besides the issue of defining pilgrimage by distance travelled, there is also the influence of constructions of pilgrimage in the western tradition influencing interpretations of pilgrimage in dynastic Egypt. Turner and Turner's model of pilgrimage includes the category of the Archaic Pilgrimages; these are 'pilgrimages which bear quite evident traces of syncretism with older religious beliefs and symbols' (1978, 10); examples of such pilgrimages include Croagh Patrick in the west of Ireland, and Chalma in Mexico. Although this classic study of pilgrimage has not been surpassed, it is based on the belief that 'pilgrimage as an institutional form does not attain real prominence until the emergence of the major historical religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam' (1978, 1), thereby relegating pre-Christian pilgrimage in Egypt to a minor role. More recent studies of pilgrimage cults have shown their significance as a means of religious expression in pre-Christian Egypt (Malaise 1987; Frankfurter 1998; Rutherford 1998; Volokhine 1998; Horbury 2003, 167-175; Dijkstra 2007).

As already noted (on p. 156), evidence of pilgrims' visits to Umm el-Qaab is found in the form of offering vessels deposited in great mounds from the 18th to the 25th Dynasty. Another crucial category of evidence is the graffiti in the temple complex, particularly because the practice lies at the nexus of the high-low knowledge dichotomy. There has always been strong interest in Greek and Roman graffiti, initially interpreted as the work of 'tourists' (Grafton Milne 1916), more recently as religiously motivated (Rutherford 2003). There is a constant disjuncture between the simplicity of the medium, often roughly or hastily scratched letters and sketches, and the idea of solemn intent. Grafton Milne writes 'It is not likely that Herodotus would scratch his name on a temple-wall...' (1916, 77), although he mentions that other contemporary Greeks do at Abydos. This is elevated from idle scribbling to the act of intellectual tourism. At the Temple of Seti I, the outlines of bare and sandalled feet are inscribed on the roof, some with hieratic and some with Greek names identifying those who had made the pilgrimage (Sety and El Zeini 1981, figs.17.5, 17.6, 17.7). Among the earliest of these markings are Third Intermediate

Period names and titles of pilgrims, which are written in black ink on the walls of the Osireion (Peden, 266-8). Other Greek graffiti indicate the transmission of the popularity of the pilgrimage and the relevance of the Temple and Osireion as a sacred site, continuing through the Ptolemaic period to the 4th c AD (Sayce 1888; Perdrizet and Lefebvre 1919; Rutherford 2003). A recent study of the Greek graffiti by Rutherford takes a narrow view of Egyptian participation in the act of pilgrimage, stating 'there is little direct evidence for pilgrimage to the festival, and it is uncertain whether this was, in practice, more than a local event' (2003, 174). He does not admit the evidence of the enormous numbers of brick cenotaphs and stelae set up at Abydos as evidence for pilgrimage, whereas most other writers do (Mojsov 2005, 51; Simpson 1974; Yoyotte 1960), and classifies the *Abydosfahrt* as an 'imaginary' journey (173) rather than a record of an actual journey. This downplays the fact that an explicitly *return* journey to Abydos formed an extremely common theme in funerary religion. Furthermore, other archaeological evidence such as the volume of offering detritus at Umm el-Qaab, and the major roads marking the processional routes, from the Temple of Seti I and the principal Temple of Ramesses at Kom el Sultan, through the cemeteries and out to Umm el-Qaab, surely reflect the scale and longevity of the pattern of mass pilgrimage. Ikhernofret's biography conveys an idea of the crowds participating in the drama:

'I conducted the Procession of Wep-waut, when he goes forth to champion his father. I repulsed the attackers of the *neshmet*-bark, I felled the foes of Osiris. I conducted the Great Procession...Decked in his beautiful regalia he proceeded to the domain of Peqer. I cleared the god's path to his tomb in Peqer...'[128]

(Stela of Ikhernofret, Berlin Museum 1204, *c.*1878-1841 BC; trans. Lichtheim 1975, 124-5)

While the importance of the festival and sacred places to the local populace is beyond question, the evidence suggests that Abydos attracted many visitors from elsewhere in Egypt. Their journeys to the temples in the town, the nearby cemeteries and Peqer, enabled them to experience a connection with Osiris in life, preparatory to becoming assimilated to him in death. The festival performances exemplify Connerton's classic

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[128] 'Peqer' is generally understood to refer to Umm el-Qaab (see also p. 222 below).

statement of the mechanism of social memory, in which 'images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by (more or less) ritual performance' (1989, 38).

3.3.4 Festivals

Youssef has argued that certain local Egyptian festivals were retained by the Copts but rededicated to Christian saints (1990; 1992; 1999). At Dendara, the festival of Osiris on 11 Khoiak, was replaced by a festival to St Ptolemy of Dendara (whom Youssef suggests is the founder of the temple recast as a Christian martyr); the festival on 11 Paone, marking the date the lamentations of Isis for Osiris, is argued, less convincingly, to have been replaced by the festival for St Claud of Antioch on the same date, drawing attention to the recurrence of the theme of the grieving sister in the texts of St Claud. We should therefore expect a local Christian festival at Abydos to fall on one of the important dates of the festivals of Osiris.

The temple however clearly expanded its range of activities towards the end of the Late Period. An incubation oracle of Osiris-Serapis operated from the Ptolemaic period, overlapping with an oracle cult to Bes; the temple also operated as the centre for a healing cult. Rutherford divides the Greek graffiti into three phases (6th c BC -3rd c BC, unspecified purpose; later Hellenistic to Roman: appeals to Osiris, Serapis, Bes; later Roman Empire-4th c AD: focus on Bes oracle), showing the pilgrims' fluid approach to the relationship between the gods of the dead and resurrection, and the god of protection (Rutherford 2003, 177-180). The extension of temple activities is entirely consonant with the diversification of priestly roles seen all over Egypt in the first three centuries AD.

Through the pilgrims' or appellants' graffiti, contrasts begin to appear between the Osiris complex of Sety I and the biographies of tombs at Umm el-Qaab, or Cemetery D. The royal mortuary temple and cenotaph starts to allow public access deeper and deeper into the temple, where they can view reliefs depicting the symbolic relationship between the king and the god Osiris. At the same time, a so-called 'folk' god is brought into the temple, and oracles or divine aid are sought equally from Osiris, Serapis and Bes. The act

of visiting the temple, and registering one's presence there by writing on its walls, becomes an additional important part of the ritual. Elsewhere in Egypt, scholars have noted the practice of gouging grooves into temples, churches and cult statues in order to remove stone dust, which was believed to have magical efficacy (Traunecker 1987; Brand 2000, 25). 'Cup-marks' and grooves cut into the Coptos Colossi, and into a statue and stone pillar from Hierakonpolis, attest to deliberate removal of material by abrasion in early Dynastic monumental contexts (Kemp 2000, 226). Using the later evidence for the continuation of this practice, it is thought that this kind of intervention had a ritual purpose. Traunecker suggested that the anonymous marks in temples were made by the illiterate, and point to the enactment of a healing ritual related to the Graeco-Roman magical prescriptions which advocate dissolving dust in liquid and drinking it (1987, 235). A similar idea about sacred dust reappears in Arabic alchemical treatises, where it is considered to constitute a talisman (Haarmann 1980, 61). This has not been observed at the Abydos Osiris complex, but may well have taken place. Furthermore, the high number of foreign-language graffiti is surely indicative of how popular and successful the locally-supported Egyptian festival was, and of how its reputation spread among the non-Egyptian populace, to the point where it drew Egyptianized Greeks into a religious landscape where death and resurrection remained subjects of intense focus.[129]

In the fourth century AD, Abydos was a centre of the cult of Bes. This deity had strong popular roots as a guardian of mothers and children dating back to the Middle Kingdom, his apotropaic role extending in the Roman period to include military and magical aspects (Michaelides 1963-4; Dunand 1997). The Bes oracle at Abydos was referred to by Ammianus Marcellinus in the context of its official 'closure' by Constantius II in 359 AD (Ammianus 19.12.3-12, trans. Hamilton 1986, 181-2). Yet as Frankfurter has pointed out, even in the fourth century, Coptic spells attest to the continuing appeals to Osiris as dispenser of oracles (1998*b*, 170), so the pattern thus far reads as one of the superimposition of Serapis and Bes upon Osiris, rather than their replacement of the

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[129] Contra Rutherford: '...over time the Egyptian origins of the building may have become of less importance than the living tradition of Greek visitors implied by the graffiti' (2003, 186).

ancient god of the dead.[130] At nearby Panopolis (Akhmim), a large number of 2nd-3rd c wooden mummy labels were found with demotic inscriptions praying to 'Osiris-Sokar, great Lord of Abydos' (Watterson 1988, 30), suggesting that Osiris was still understood within the region as the main god of the dead at Abydos. Frankfurter has made the convincing argument that it was Bes' function as *protector* of Osiris' corpse, and his powers in the mortuary sphere, that explain the shift in oracular gods from Osiris/Serapis to Bes in the 1st-2nd centuries (1998*b*, 172-3).

3.3.5 Transformation of the pilgrimage

Little attention has been given to the fact that the pilgrimage to Abydos survived into the modern era. It should not be entirely surprising that the object of this pilgrimage shifted from Osiris to Moses, given how comprehensively Moses influenced local religious practice at Umm el-Qaab, in the temples and in the town. This 'great pilgrimage', as Viaud records (1979, 17-18), took place until an unspecified date (probably the nineteenth or early twentieth century), with the monastery of Moses as its destination in which the body of Moses was housed (Leroy 1908, 195). There is slight confusion as to which of three monasteries this was. As already mentioned, there were three Coptic monasteries at Abydos, all referred to by Sicard during his travels in 1718. Viaud states that the pilgrims aimed for one of them: 'De ce monastère il ne reste plus maintenant que des ruines' (1979, 18), by which he probably means the monastery of Deir Musa, also known as Deir Sitt Damiana, located within Qaa's First Dynasty enclosure slightly to the northwest of the Shunet el-Zebib (Coquin and Martin 1991, 707; O'Connor 1989, 59). A village eventually grew up centering on this monastery, with a church dating from approximately 1590, its cemetery lying behind it (Kemp 1975). Amélineau made himself known to the gommos (superior) of the convent, 'car ce convent existe toujours, ayant toujours été renouvelé à mesure qu'il tombait en ruines' (1899, 15). There was a second monastery, south of Deir Musa, also observed by Sicard, in whose day it was in ruins. The third monastery he noted was one mile south of 'Pehke', and had an enclosure wall and a

[130] Frankfurter explicitly discusses the elevation of the Bes cult from a 'folk' to a 'great' tradition (1998*b*, 174).

waterwheel. Abu Salih had referred to a monastery of Bani Musa in the 13thc, containing the body of Moses, and Maqrizi states that there was a large monastery there (Meinardus 1965, 302; 1977, 413-4).

The veneration of holy bodies among Christian Egyptians had an ambivalent beginning. Up until the fourth century, evidence including mummy labels with the *chi-rho* monogram, and representations of the deceased holding the *crux ansata* on the shrouds of mummified remains found at Antinopolis, shows mummification continuing among early Christians (Prominska 1980; Bowen 2003; Aufderheide et al 2004).[131] Antony had made his feelings clear about mummification: '...he himself addressed lay men and women quite sternly, saying this was neither pleasing nor permissible to God ... By these means he demonstrated that the Egyptian practice with regard to the dead was wrong, even in the case of the bodies of holy men' (*Vita*, trans White 1988, 66). Sensing death approaching, he fled from his fellow monks to prevent them carrying out 'the Egyptian practice'.[132] The social practice was sufficiently embedded that it overcame this prohibition, in the special case of saints, and the preservation of the body became a critical index of sanctity. And in due course, the body of Moses became the new focal point of visiting Abydos in one of the monasteries described above. There is a general consensus that 'it is now indisputable that native Egyptian traditions about the dead and their powers, the sacred value of

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[131] Although there is still no systematic study of mummies identified as Christians, reports from a number of sites document various methods of mummification continuing throughout the Coptic period. Layers of berries and salt were found between linen bandages at Karara (Badawy 1978, 93), salt and 'greasy' products used at the Monastery of St Mark, but by the sixth century, in general bodies were only 'cursorily cured' (Ikram and Dodson 1998, 131). Dunand and Lichtenberg suggest that 'It was probably the arrival of Islam that brought a definitive end to the practice of mummification by imposing burial directly in the ground, with the corpse wrapped only in a shroud' (2006, 128-9).

[132] The *Life* addresses two aspects of burial practice: mummification and keeping the body at home for a while: 'And he would shame the laity and rebuke the women, saying, "This practice is neither lawful nor in any way godly"...By saying these things Antony was showing that the person who does not hide the bodies of the dead after death transgress the law, even if the bodies are those of saints' (Athanasius' Greek *Life*, trans. Vivian and Athanassakis 2003, 249). Reading between the lines of the *Life*, a clear anxiety about maintaining the integrity of the body and of the burial place emerges: 'Therefore, you bury my body in the earth and follow my instructions so that no one knows the place where my body is except you alone. For I will receive it back imperishable on the day of the Lord' (Coptic *Life*, 252). It could be argued that this anxiety is more typically Egyptian than the burial practices Antony apparently seeks to avoid.

bodies, and the salvific powers of divinized human figures influenced the establishment of the Coptic martyr cult to a tremendous degree' (Frankfurter 1998*a*, 44). Here in the case of Osiris and Moses a transference can be seen between the cult of the dead king or god's body *coupled with* transference of the act of pilgrimage.

Beyond the simple act of visiting and venerating the body of the saint at the monastery, one other glimpse of the nature of Christian pilgrimage is afforded by Shenute's sermon in which he rails against talking, eating, drinking, frolicking, and fornicating when visiting shrines. He gives the following injunction: 'Do not make visits to the shrines of the martyrs the occasion of destroying your flesh in the tombs round about them, or in the other buildings near by, or in the corners inside them...' (Worrell 1945, 23). From this, it can be inferred that in the 4th-5th century pilgrimage was as riotous and enjoyable as it was pious, and that religious leaders perceived this to be a significant problem. At this point in time, pilgrimage was included among the acceptable forms of expression of orthodox religion, and what would be later termed the great tradition, but certain aspects of its execution were stigmatised as they had not been in the dynastic period.[133] The conflict arises due to the new Christian ethos of sexual purity associated with the *person*, not just the place (rules of purity having operated within the Egyptian temple), and with the whole community, rather than just the priesthood, when members engaged in expressions of piety by visiting deceased martyrs. The fact that many people *continued* to enjoy themselves on pilgrimages and at festivals, as will be seen in the Islamic period (p. 250 below), thereby contravening the strictures on ritual purity, gradually pushes pilgrimage into the realm of the inferior 'little tradition'.

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[133] Compare 19th century repression of behaviour at festivals: Hornblower (1927) reported that the *'ulama'* forced the Ministry of the Interior to suppress the 'public representation on a cart of the act of paederasty' which took place until 1895 at the Cairo festival of Sheikh el Far. Hornblower interpreted it as a reference to the ancient treatment of defeated enemies (151). Poole describes other 'inappropriate' behaviour at festivals: '...you may be surprised to hear that the manners of the modern Egyptians are not wholly different from those of the ancient Alexandrians, who flocked to the licentious festivals celebrated at Canopus in honour of the god Serapis'; at the festival at Tanta, 'I am told, brandy is drunk almost as freely as coffee' (Poole 2003, 30).

3.3.6 The female ascetic community at the Temple of Seti I

Coptic graffiti at the temple of Seti were first copied by Bouriant (1887, 382-8), and later by Murray, and discussed by Crum, in 1904 (an example is shown in Figure 49 below). They were found throughout the temple, but were concentrated in the south wing in room Z of Caulfield's plan, and the nearby Corridor of the Kings (Figure 50 below). These graffiti indicate the presence of a community of ascetic women, who seem to have occupied the temple in some sense from the sixth to around the tenth century.

Figure 49 Graffiti on the south wall of 'Room Z': 'Apa Moses, Apa Sh[enute], Ama Sousanna'

From Murray 1904, pl. 30, fig. 19

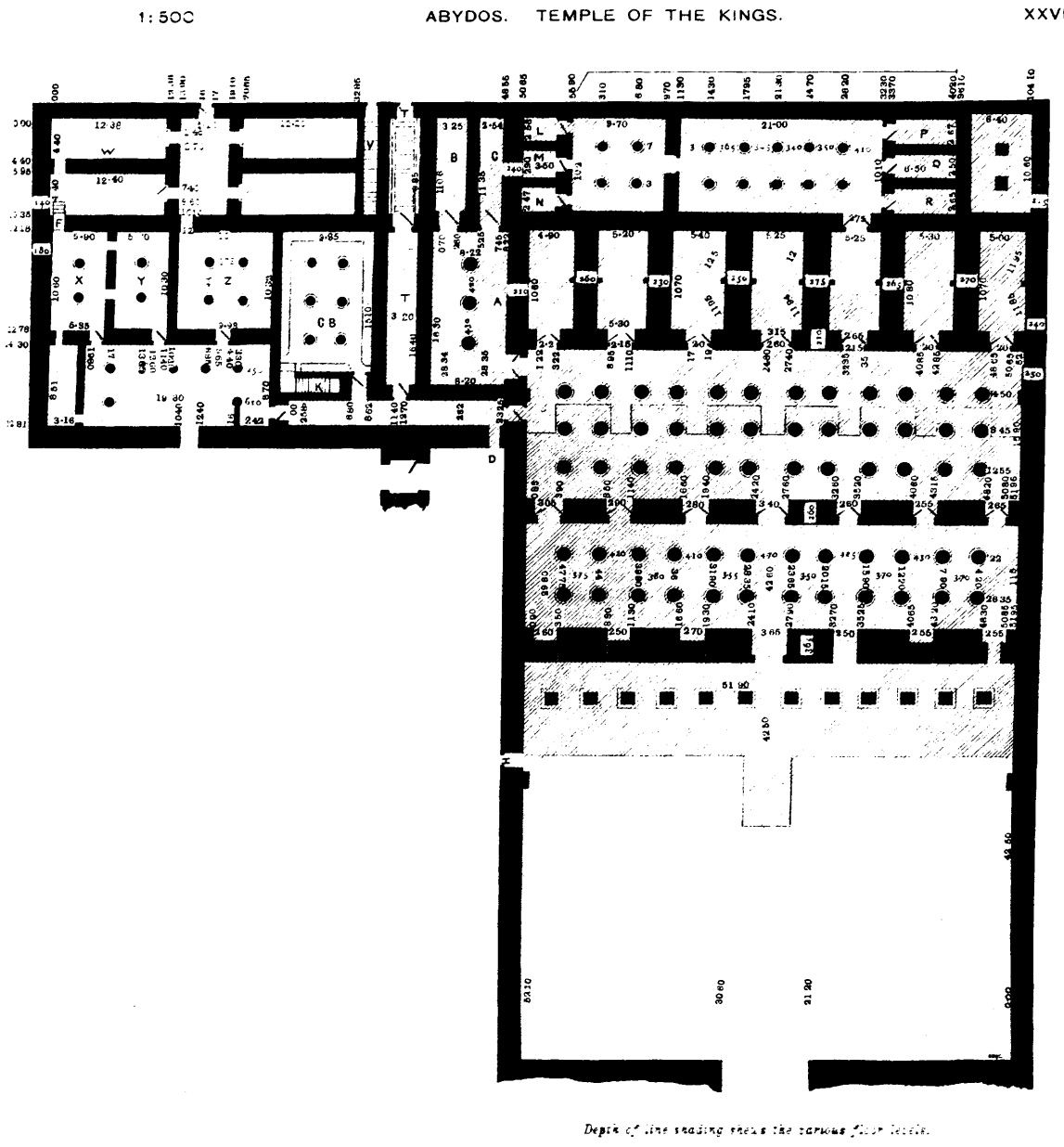

Figure 50 Caulfield's plan of the Temple of Seti I

The Corridor of the Kings leads off from the left side of the second hypostyle hall; 'Room Z' lies just beyond it. From Caulfield 1902, pl. 26

Organised female ascetic communities in Egypt are traceable as far back as the *Vita Antonii*, in which Athanasius describes the saint placing his sister with 'respected and trusted virgins', around the year 270 AD; the Pseudo-Athanasian canons (*c.* AD 350-450) dealt with groups of virgins who formed their own communities (Elm 1994, 227-34). Rather than join an existing group, Pachomius' sister Maria actually founded a female

monastery near Tabennisi around 329 AD, and by the fifth century, there were female ascetic communities throughout Egypt. The community at Abydos provides rare, if sparse, archaeological evidence of the concerns of these women, and counterbalances the picture drawn by more formal textual sources.

In the temple of Seti, the women's inscriptions centre on invocations to important saints in the Coptic church, and the recording of some aspect of the Nile flood – five graffiti in the Chamber behind the Corridor of Kings (47, B.13, B.15, B.16, B.17) name the woman responsible for recording and writing the date and level of the water (Murray 1904, 42). Early commentators supposed that these notations related to the level of the inundation in an undiscovered Nilometer. Delattre recently challenged this reading of the inscriptions, and argued they recorded the presence of the inundation in the reservoir of the Osireion itself, which was fed by the Nile via a canal and ground water (2003, 136). Coptic saints, including Aaron, Shenute and Piamoun, often involved themselves with the behaviour of the Nile flood, predicting or controlling its levels (Bonneau 1964, 288; Frankfurter 1998, 45-6; 2003, 371-2). Rufinus, writing in the fourth century, states that Christians took over measuring the Nile, and in Coptic art, the Nile itself is often depicted as a classical river god (Auth 2004, 1142). A sixth-century textile shows *putti* celebrating the river reaching its ideal height of 16 cubits, exposing the numbers 17 and 18 on a Nilometer (Figure 51 below; Rutschowscaya 1990, 81).[134]

[134] See also Hermann 1959. Auth misinterprets the scene in suggesting that the putti are recording the river levels at 17 and 18 (2004, 1142).

Figure 51 Coptic textile showing *putti* flanking a Nilometer, with Nile gods above; 6th c AD, from Antinoe

Tapestry *orbiculus* (medallion applied to tunic); linen and wool. 12.5 x 13.5 cm. Louvre AF 5448. From Rutschowscaya 1990, 81

At Abydos, the absence of archaeological evidence for a conventional Nilometer suggests that the Osireion may have functioned as a device for measuring the inundation, and the women of the ascetic community carried out this task. Obviously, the level of the water would have the same relevance to agricultural practices as the information gained at other Nilometers in Egypt, but here in the temple there is another connection with the previous cult of Osiris. Delattre suggested this was a phenomenon of Christianization of ancient

practice, 'Christianization de l'inondation de l'Osireion d'Abydos qui a une résonance sacrée dans la religion égyptienne en tant que symbole de création du monde, c'est à dire en tant que symbole de vie' (138), and he goes on to hint that the theme of resurrection and eternal return is continued from Osirian into Christian religion through the practice of noting the water levels in the ancient god's cenotaph. Thus there seems to be a symbolic aspect to the choice of measuring and recording spots that acknowledges the previous significance of the water in the Osireion.

The use of the temple by Christians has raised questions – where did the community of women live, was there a church or chapel built into the temple which left no trace, or, as Grossmann has suggested, 'to all appearance ... the temple did not undergo any real Christianization' (1991, 41).[135] The palimpsest of the temple thus follows a different pattern from that of the majority of the tombs, which move from being the resting place of the dead to the hiding place of the living. The temple remained a *public* space, inhabited by the ancient gods, who though repressed by imperial edicts or challenged by the incursions of holy men, remained active and powerful. The women associated with the temple were the recipients of letters from Moses (Till 1936; Coquin 1986), and were visited by Pisentius as a graffito records (B.13, Murray 1904, 39, 42). They also either executed or at least viewed various images drawn on top of the pharaonic scenes on the walls. These drawings show another aspect of their view of the past significance of the place. As in Tomb D69 in Cemetery D, boats figure prominently - there were no less than seven drawings of boats in the central hall of the Osireion (examples in Figure 52).[136]

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[135] The remains of a settlement dating to late antiquity have been preserved a few hundred yards northeast of the Seti temple, beneath the EAO resthouse. During the construction of the resthouse a church was found, as yet unpublished (Grossman 1991, 41); this may be a plausible location for the women's community.

[136] Comparable ship drawings in monastic complexes include those at the monastery of St Jeremias at Saqqara, and of Apa Apollo at Bawit (Rassart-Debergh, 1992; 1995).

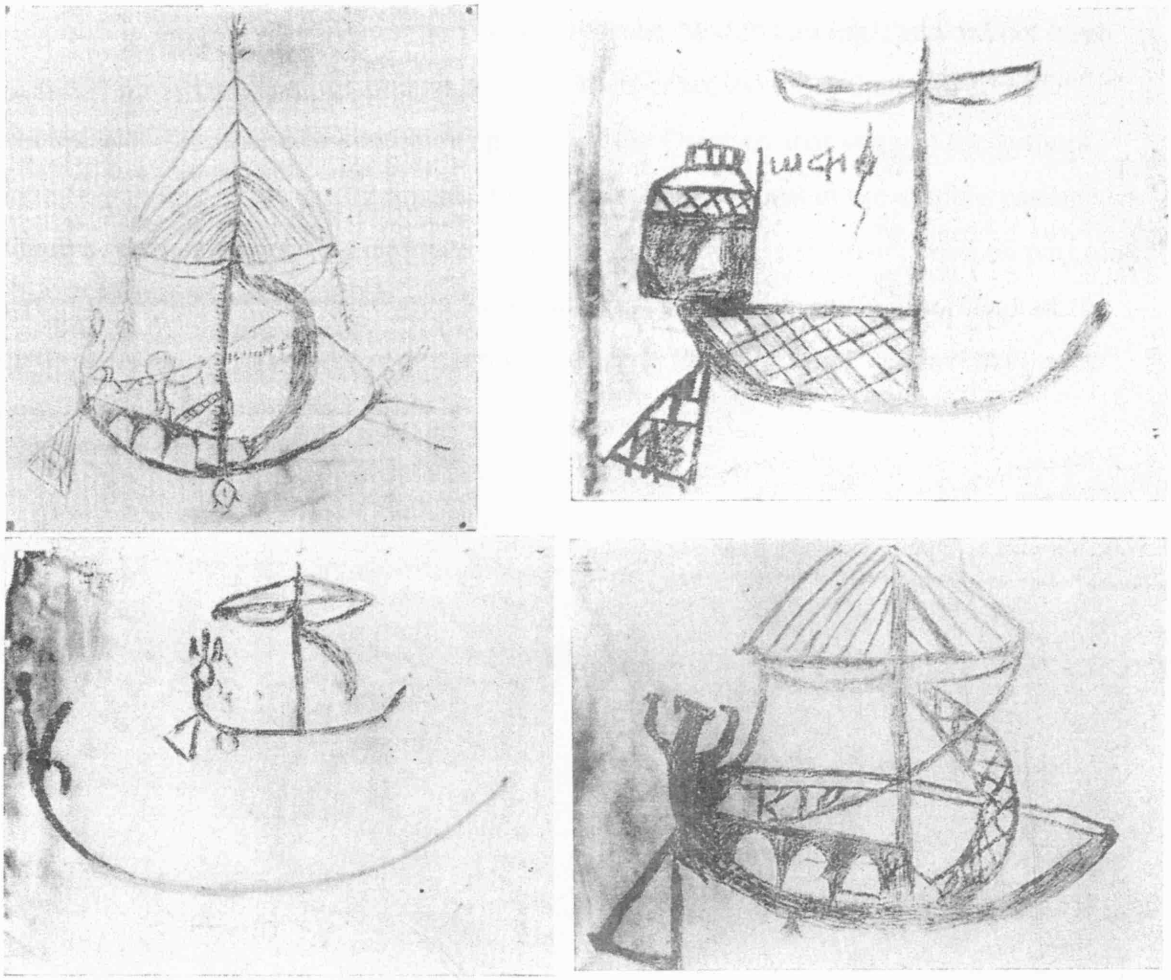


Figure 52 Boat graffiti on the walls of the Osireion

From Piankoff 1958-60, figs. 2, 3, 5, 6

Other images include crosses, birds, fish, lions, fantastic animals and riders. These graffiti may be compared with those at the Ramesseum, which was partially transformed into a church, and covered in Coptic decoration (Leblanc and Hassanein 1989; Lecuyot 2000; Rassart-Debergh 2004, 298-9).

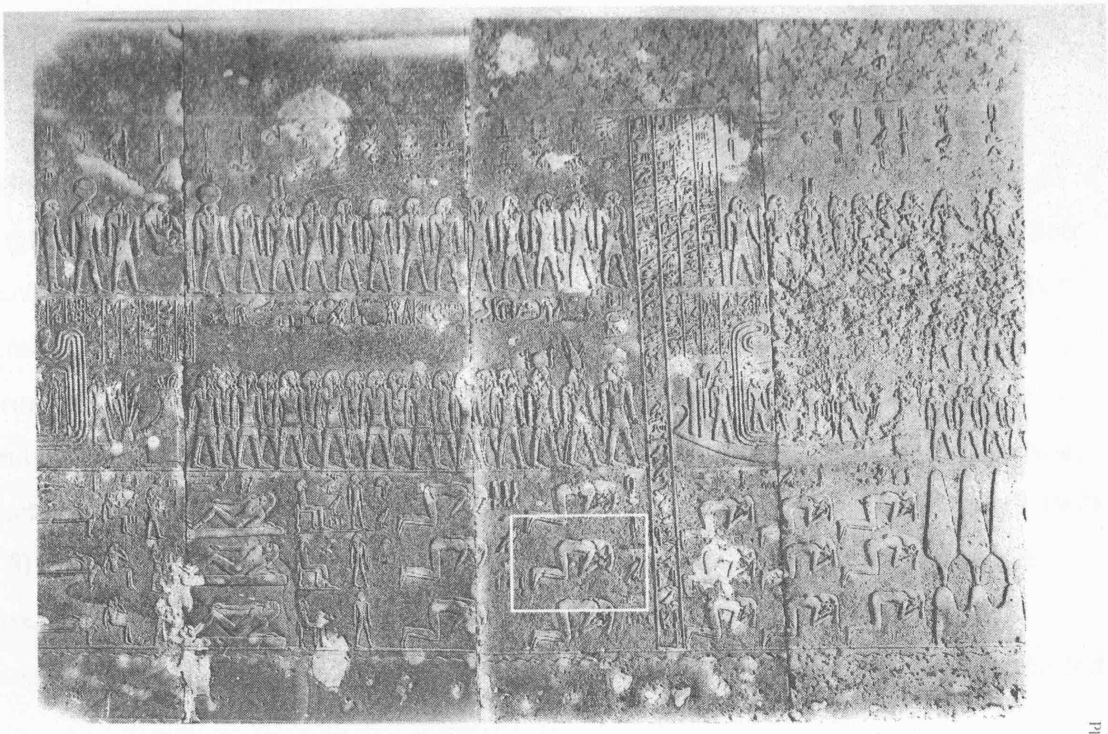
A problem with much of the work carried out in recording graffiti is that it tends to deliberately decontextualise the inscriptions; without detailed photographs or new fieldwork at the sites in question it is impossible to see whether Coptic graffiti is superimposed on earlier material. While Piankoff did not explore whether there was a

relationship between the Coptic graffiti and dynastic 'underdrawing', and did not have access to photographs of the images showing their exact location, there are some examples of palimpsest or contiguous graffiti at the Osireion that suggest the authors were responding to the earlier images. One example was found in the sloping passage, where a scene interpreted as a female martyr being tortured is superimposed on part of the text of the Book of Caverns (Figure 53, Figure 54, Figure 55 below). The image of the martyr can be said to rewrite or reinterpret the scene from the Book of Caverns on the roof.

Figure 53 Depiction of female martyrdom from the Osireion

From Piankoff 1958-60, fig. 1

Figure 54 Details from the relief of the Book of Caverns, and the Coptic martyrdom graffito



East side of Roof of Sarcophagus Chamber (cont.)

Plate LXXVII

Figure 55 Book of Caverns, east side of roof, Osireion

The detail shown in Figure 54 is highlighted. From Frankfort 1933, pl. 77

Returning to Shenute's *Sermon against the hieroglyphs*, 'Thus then at the site of a shrine to an unclean spirit, it will henceforth be a shrine to the Holy Spirit…' (p. 179 above), it has been noted above that the response of Moses to this exhortation was to aggressively 'cleanse' the sites (3.3.2 above). The story of Poemen, Anoub and five brothers from Scetis who settled in an abandoned temple at Terenuthis describes similar, if more polite, direct action: Anoub throws stones at a pagan statue but apologizes to it (Gould 1993, 136). Young offered the following interpretation of Shenute's *Sermon*: 'Shenoute is saying that the walls of the converted shrine were no longer to be covered with hieroglyphs and pagan scenes but adorned with paintings illustrating stories from the Bible or portraying prominent characters of Scripture' (1981, 357 n. 18). The inscription of Christian imagery on the walls of re-occupied tombs and temples is on one level a response to the dictates of community leaders such as Shenute, but on another level it can

be seen as a response to the images already inscribed on the walls, to the previous uses of these places, and to the 'spirits', clean or not.

Both Petrie and Dreyer made the Early Dynastic phase of Djer's tomb and indeed all of Umm el-Qaab, the principal focus of their attention; despite the interval between their excavations, the questions they have sought to answer concern the earliest kings. For Amélineau, the discovery of the ultimate archaeological find, a god's tomb, was his goal. From an anthropological perspective, Kopytoff argued that 'things could not be fully understood at just one point in their existence and processes and cycles of production, exchange and consumption had to be looked at as a whole' (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 170). The foregoing discussion in this chapter has aimed to consider the long-term processes at work at Umm el-Qaab and in the town of Abydos, the accumulating biographies of these places, and the responses to and reuse of them in the Coptic period.

4 Biographies of the Tomb II

4.1 Following the Islamic conquest: transitions in mortuary cult

The prohibition of the cult was not necessarily accompanied by the disappearance of the belief in the numinous power of a place.

(Kákosy 1990, 177)

Ancient tombs, in the Nile Valley, established their own individual reputations for sacredness, or terror, or healing. Following Coptic reoccupation and re-use as dwellings, the ancient tombs never reverted to their original role as burial places. Instead, burial of Muslims in rural Egypt took place in new grounds outside the town or village, often at the foot of the gebel (Ory 1991, 122-123; Figure 56), or outside the monastery in the case of Coptic burials (Figure 57).[137] This marked discontinuity in cemetery location has not yet been the subject of adequate study and analysis.[138] In the Delta, however, there are many instances of the direct palimpsestual use of burial sites – modern cemeteries being built directly into ancient ones at Kom Umm el Laban, Tell Abu el Afrita el Kebir, Tell Abu Shieisa, Tell Bana, Baramkin, el-Qarawi, and Tell Samara (see EES Delta Survey). Topographical considerations in the Delta have clearly influenced cemetery location until very recently: Islamic cemeteries have been built up on existing high ground which tends to be ancient sites or tells, which in turn were located on earlier sites or natural high features such as river levees or sand hills. Since the cessation of the annual inundation, the placement of cemeteries is much more random, and single tombs can be sited in the middle of fields (P. Wilson, pers. comm.). Thus far I have argued for an underlying relationship between the uses of the tomb in the pharaonic period and subsequently by Christian holy men and their supporters; I now turn to the question of whether there is a

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[137] The transition from mixed Christian and 'pagan' to principally monastic cemeteries took place *c*.4th-5th c; according to Bowen (2003, 169), separate cemeteries for Christians should not be expected before the third century in Egypt.

[138] This discontinuity fits with Parker Pearson's model: 'The patterns of status separation...made visible by a discontinuity with past practices, are more apparent at certain moments than others. With time, these segregational categories become lost or altered through gradual processes of elaboration, emulation and integration' (1993, 226-7).

further historical layer on top of these processes. This involves drawing together a number of different threads, the first of which is the question of sheikhs' tombs and sacred trees.

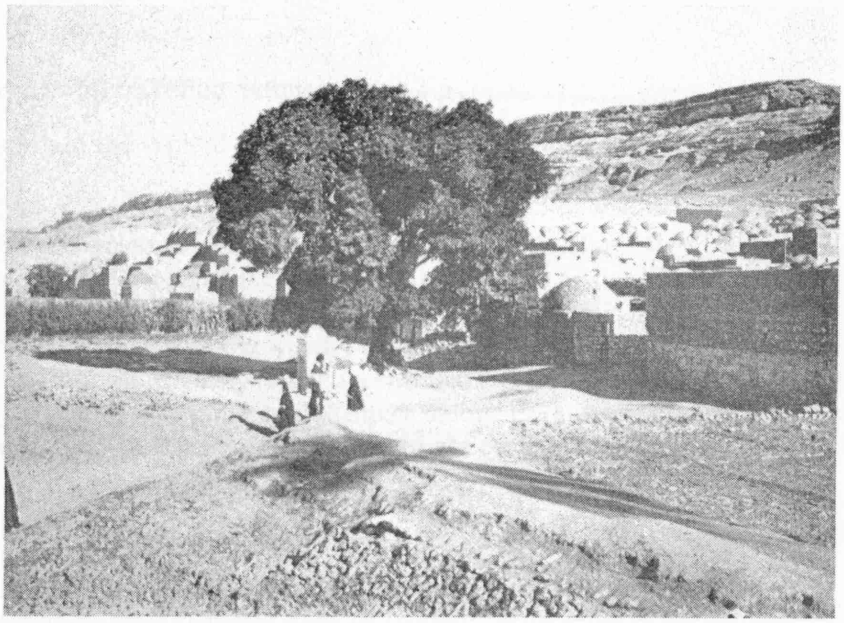

Figure 56 Moslem cemetery on the edge of the desert at Zawiet el Meitin

Note the acacia tree and well at the entrance. From Kees 1961, pl. 9 a

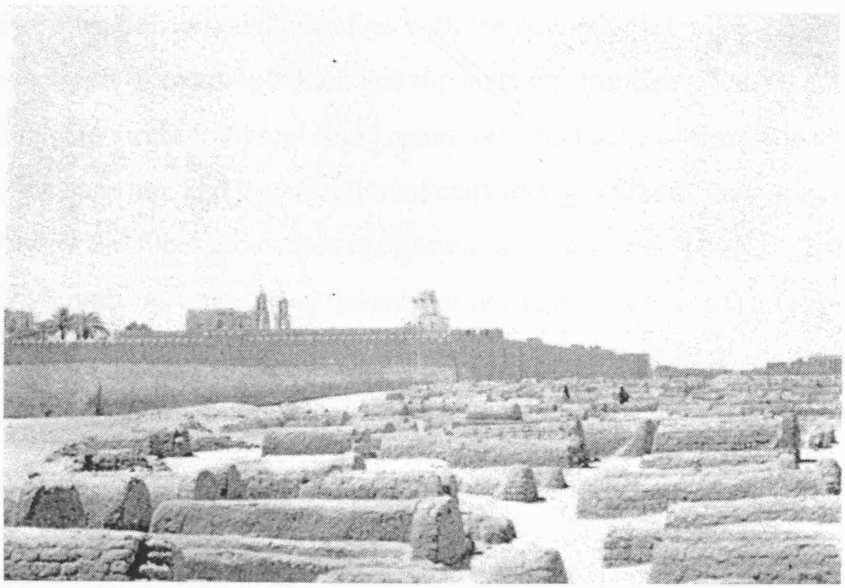

Figure 57 Coptic cemetery outside the monastery walls, Deir al-Muharraq

(Monastery of the Holy Virgin at al-Qusia, 65 km north of Asyut). From Meinardus 1965, pl.V.

4.1.1 Sheikhs' trees and tombs: sources, background

'Know, O Commander of the Faithful, that Egypt is a dusty city and green tree'.

('Amr ibn al-'As's description of Egypt, transmitted by Abu al-Mahasin; Butler 1978, 433).

In 1906, Sayce, who travelled extensively in Egypt and spent many winters on his boat on the Nile, described the typical sheikh's tomb thus:

> The qubba or "shêkh's" tomb generally has a tree standing by the side of it, just as the sacred tree stood by the side of the chapel of the local deity in the Egypt of the Pharaohs. At times the tree stands alone, without any reflected sanctity from the shêkh and his supposed tomb. Thus at Qasr es-Sayyad there is a tamarisk under which I have seen a bowl placed with a few grains of corn in it by way of offering, while a low wall of uncemented stones surrounds the sacred spot. I have often seen rags hanging upon some of these trees though the natives always assure me that they have been placed there by the Bedâwin and not by the fellahin.
>
> (Sayce 1906, 199).

Very little archaeological investigation of Islamic cemeteries in Egypt outside Cairo has been carried out, partly due to Muslim prohibitions on disturbing graves.[139] Architectural study has tended to concentrate on the elite tombs of the great cemeteries of Cairo, following Maqrizi (Creswell 1919; Massignon 1958; Behrens-Abouseif 1983), while anthropologists have concerned themselves with the occupation by the living of these city cemeteries as a result of overpopulation and the housing shortage (Watson 1992). A recent valuable ethnoarchaeological study again uses the Cairo necropoleis as its field of study, where the structure and organization of cemetery guardians, gravediggers and those employed in the funeral business is different from the rest of Egypt (el-Shohoumi 2002). Sheikhs' tombs have not been the subject of major study (for the Sinai, see Werbner 1977). In Egypt the *qubba* (domed) tomb, either singly or in small groups, is the more common form of commemorative architecture than the *zawiya* (complex

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[139] See for example Björnesjö 1998. Exceptions include the *hajj* pilgrim cemeteries on the Red Sea (Paul 1955, 67); the 13th/14thc cemetery of Kom el-Dikka in central Alexandria (Prominska 1971); the late Islamic cemetery in Bahria Oasis (Fakhry 1950). Any investigations of sheikhs' tombs or surrounding cemeteries, embedded as they are in village communities, would probably run counter to the Vermillion Accord of 1990 (see Day 1990).

surrounding Sufi or saint's tomb).[140] The very ubiquity of the *qubba* in the landscape, and its accompanying tree, has seemingly discouraged survey or analysis, except among ethnographers.

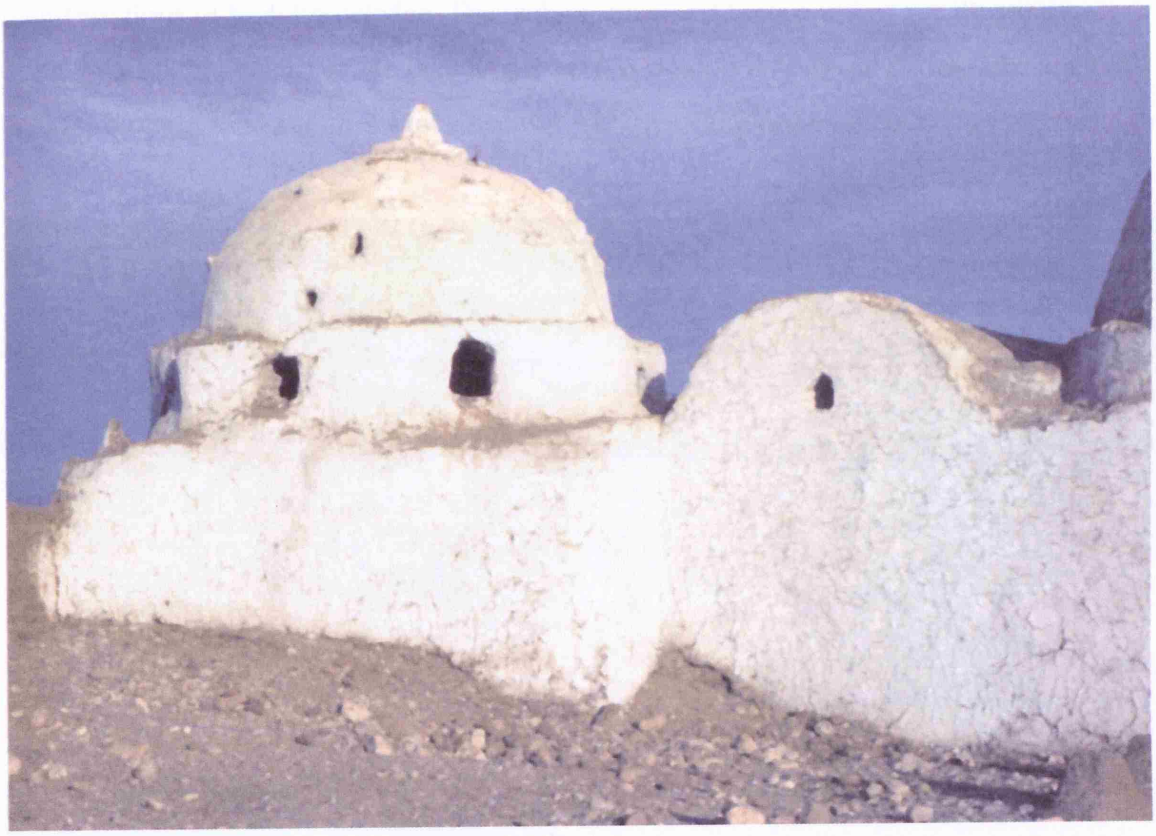

Figure 58 'Small tomb of a saint, situated just north of Luxor'

From Hopkins 2003, 139. Even in recent anthropological literature, saints' tombs are often unnamed and unlocated.

Trees have been the subject of several recent detailed Egyptological studies, either focussing on their religious aspects (Hermsen 1981; Koemoth 1994; Malaise 1995), or studying the flora of ancient Egypt from a botanical perspective (Germer 1985; Baum 1988). Information about the particular category of living sacred trees comes from ethnographers and European travellers' accounts. No dendro-chronological or C^{14} testing

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[140] In general I am following Reeves in recognizing that the two categories (sufi and saint) are *not* synonymous, but that there is overlap, and that the cult of saints in Egypt is more inclusive than 'pure' Sufism (1995, 307).

has been carried out on any of the saints' trees in Egypt, possibly because of taboos on damaging sacred entities, or because no-one has wished to pursue the matter. Both sheikhs' tombs and sacred trees have thus been relegated outside the frame of historical enquiry, while dynastic tombs and all aspects of ancient tree cults are accepted as manifestations of high knowledge. The lack of inscribed texts and images illustrating these widely-held beliefs in the Islamic period has obscured commonalities with ancient beliefs; instead, it is practices which become the core evidence to suggest continuities.

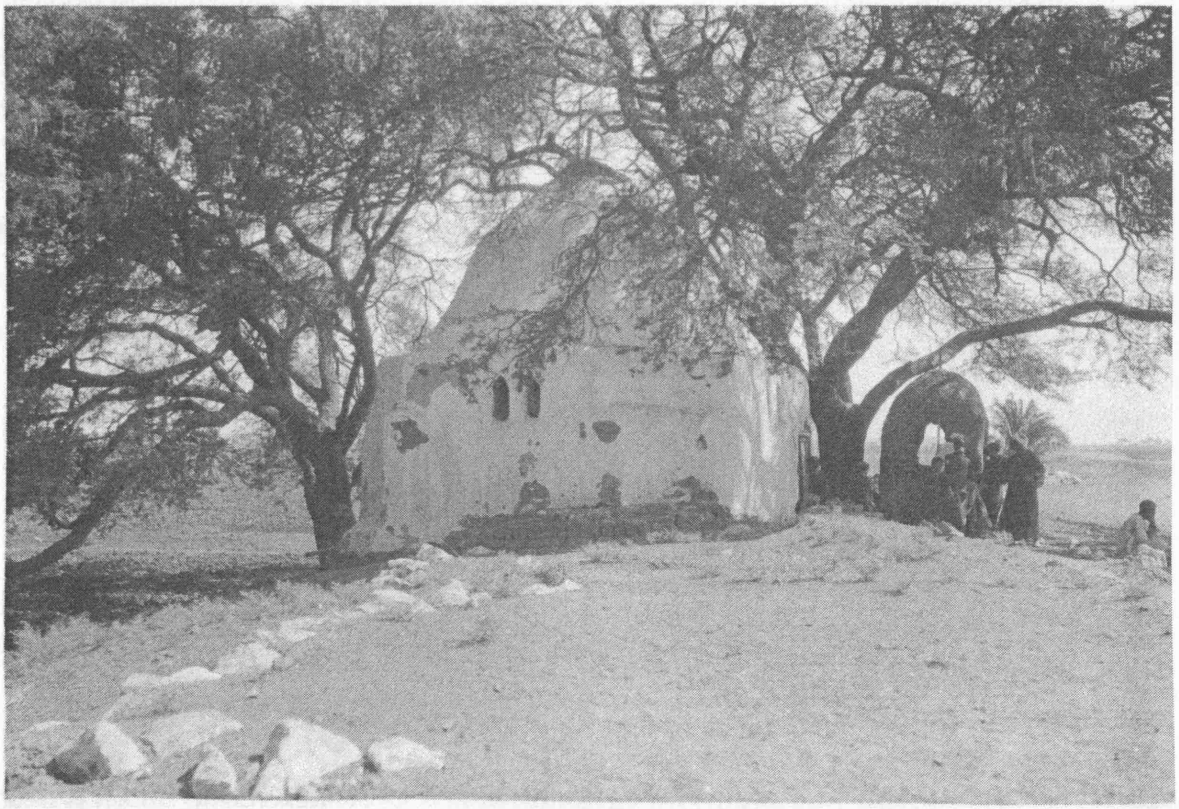

Figure 59 Tomb, trees and *sebib* of Sheikh Husayn al-Gharbawi, near village of Ma'gun in Beni Suef province, *c*.1920s

W Blackman, unpublished, Wellcome Library L0044821. Caption in WB's hand on reverse: 'He acts as a guardian of the fields in the midst of which his tomb is built.'

4.1.2 Saints' trees in medieval and modern Egypt

In medieval and modern Egypt, saints' tombs, trees and water, either alone or in combination, have often acquired a spiritual charge over time. The history of this practice

is poorly documented, except in the case of the *Shajarat Maryam* at Matariya. Recorded examples of sacred trees number around sixteen. While there were probably many more in the nineteenth century, when travellers, folklorists and historians first drew attention to the phenomenon, interest among western archaeologists or anthropologists has been insufficient to have generated a systematic survey throughout Egypt, which would provide a comprehensive body of evidence from which to draw meaningful conclusions. Long-term residents who wrote about contemporary Egypt often seemed unaware of the numbers of sacred trees (Hornblower noted that the long-term resident McPherson appeared to know of only two or three; 1945, 67). Butcher claimed, without supporting evidence, that they often marked the site of the grave of a Christian martyr 'whom the present-day Egyptian regards as a holy Moslem' (Butcher n.d. [*c.*1910], 75). Before addressing the ritual practice at sacred trees and its relationship with earlier practices, it may be useful to briefly summarize places with known sacred trees, and the approximate date of their documentation:[141]

1. Tree of Sheikh Sabr at Manial, on the bank of the Bahr al-Yusuf, observed in 1922, published in 1923 (Blackman 1923*a*, 13; 1925). The tree was believed to mark the burial spot of the sheikh; nails and human hair were fastened into its trunk.

2. Tree of Sheikh Farrash al-Nabi, Dimishkin, observed in 1922, published in 1923 (Blackman 1923*a*, 13). *Qubba* and tree situated near the village.

3. Tree of Sheikh Abu 'Agur / Saint Mittias al-'Agirmi, Upper Egypt, observed *c.*1922 and believed to date back more than 200 years, published in 1924 (Blackman 1924, 67- 68). Numerous ragged handkerchiefs were suspended from the prickly acacia, beneath which the saint was buried. The saint was venerated by Christians as well as Moslems.

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[141] Sacred trees in the Delta have gone largely unnoticed; there are examples of them still extant (e.g. several at Sal el Hagar), but local knowledge of their significance appears to be diminishing. My thanks are due to Dr Penny Wilson for this information. In the literature on funerary customs, the Delta tradition of planting aloes on graves is sometimes noted (see Galâl 1937, 215; El-Aswad 1987, 214).

4. Tree of Sheikh Sa'id, 'Ezbah Mismar, Miniah province, observed in early 1920s, published in 1924 (Blackman 1925; 1926*a* fig. 2), 1947 (Buhl 1947, 96). Women wanting to have a child visited the tomb on three consecutive Fridays, stepped over the sheikh's stone seven times and ate dates from his tree.

5. Trees of Sheikh Gadullah (*Jad Allah*) at Lahun, observed in early 1920s, published in 1924 (Blackman 1925). Two or three trees grew near the tomb, which was attended by man called 'the servant of the sheikh', living in a nearby hut. Taboos enforced the prohibitions on taking leaves without performing the correct prayers and giving an offering of candles or money.

6. Tree of Qasr al-Sayyad, observed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, published in 1906: 'there is a tamarisk under which I have seen a bowl placed with a few grains of corn in it by way of offering, while a low wall of uncemented stones surrounds the sacred spot' (Sayce 1906, 199). Sayce noted rags hanging on the trees and was given the questionable information that it was the Bedouin, not the fellahin, who had placed them there (1906, 199; see also p. 202 above).

7. Grove of *Sukkan al-Sunt*, 'the Inhabitants of the Acacias', in Nezlet Batran, near Giza, published in 1930. Hornblower noted that the grove was unusual in having 'no connection with any holy personnages; some of the neighbours, sticklers for the orthodox, will say that it was planted by a sheikh, but they can never name him...' (Sayce 1920, 202; Hornblower 1930, 17; Bachatly 1930). Keimer noted that Strabo refers to a grove near Memphis (*Geography* 17.1.32), possibly to be identified with Itjitawy, and quotes Jomard's suggestion that the ancient groves were considered sacred in that area because they held back the sand dunes (1932, 95). Compare Leeder's account of "the people of the blessing" inhabiting unlocated sacred trees (1918, 79).[142]

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[142] 'On special days, all the village folk think their sacred tree is bright with the most delicate illumination, and soft voices are heard in its boughs; the Copts and the Moslems alike thinking

8. Tree cult at Hermopolis/Dayr al-Muharraq, one of the resting places during the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. 'In al-Ashmunain (Hermopolis Magna) there was a tree that worshiped the traces of Jesus' footsteps. Eventually, Jesus blessed the tree, which had bowed its head when Jesus approached' (Meinardus 2002, 86). Documented by Sozomen (5th c AD), Cassiodorus (6th c AD), Theophanius (8th c AD). Doresse suggested two possibilities – that this cult was simply mimicking the well-known cult of Heliopolis, or that it represented the straightforward Christianisation of a sacred tree, as at Heliopolis (1960, 28).[143]

9. Tree cult of 'Dairut al-Sharif' in Upper Egypt, where 'the villagers show the tree of Mary, which is said to be two thousand years old, since it provided shade for the holy family...Muslims visit the tree on Fridays' (Meinardus 2002, 85-6).

10. Tree of Sheikh Abu Najjar, near Siut, photographed and published by Blackman in 1926 (1926*a*, fig. 1).

11. Tree of Sheikh Umbarak, photographed and published by Blackman in 1926 (1926*a*, fig. 6).

12. Tree of Sitt Jirja, in the town of Girga (Thinis, ancient Tjeny) in northern Upper Egypt, published by Blackman in 1926 (1926*a*, 51). The leaves of her tree were used as a cure for sore eyes.

13. Tree of 'Mandoura' or 'Fatma', 'une femme thaumaturge', at Roda near Cairo, mentioned by Keimer (1932, 85), and noted by Butcher (n.d., *c*.1910, 75), who describes it covered with nails and pieces of coloured cloth. Both authors say there was no vestige of a tomb.

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that the saint is about the tree at that time—saints of the trees are called "the people of the blessing' (Leeder 1918, 79).

[143]Doresse believed that nothing remained of the tree in the 1960s.

14. Tree of Sidi Khadr, at 'Kinayyiset al-Dahriya' in the province of Beheira, noted by Biegman (1990, 49). Candles and lamps were burned here on Monday and Thursday evenings.

15. Tree of Sheikh Abu al-Qasim Abu 'Ali in Akhmim, noted by Biegman (1990, 58, fig. 60), with nails driven into the trunk.

16. The *Shajarat Maryam* at Matariya. Now in a built-up suburb north of Cairo, close to the ancient centre of Heliopolis. 'Every branch within reaching distance is covered with rags tied by Christians and Moslems, for it is believed that the tree has potent magical properties' (Morton 1938, 138).

Figure 60 'The Holy Tree of Meterah, Egypt'. Coloured lithograph by Louis Haghe after David Roberts, 1849

Without suggesting that the 'Virgin's Tree' at Matariya, near ancient Heliopolis, is the model which the development of all the other tree cults followed, it deserves a brief excursus simply because the historical data is more extensive than for any other tree.

The *Shajarat Maryam* at Matariya is the most well-known sacred tree in Egypt. Documented at this site within written traditions from 30 BC to the present day, it is still treated as an aid to fertility and a source of healing by Muslims as well as Christians.[144] Its primary contemporary association is with the Coptic tradition of the wanderings of the Holy Family, so in this respect it differs from the majority of tree cults in Egypt which are associated with Muslim saints.

Whether identified as persea, balsam, sycamore, date-palm or fig, a tree is documented almost continuously at this location from the Old Kingdom to the present day. In dynastic Egypt, a tree referred to as the *išd* tree appears in textual sources from the Old Kingdom and pictorial sources from the New Kingdom (Kákosy 1980). In symbolic terms, the *išd* tree, possibly to be identified as the persea,[145] starts as the primordial tree, and later becomes a symbol associated with long and successful royal rule. In the New Kingdom, the king effectively appropriated an existing tree cult. The location of the tree may have been in the temple of Neith/Re at Heliopolis. As Koemoth has shown, a number of cult centres followed the Heliopolitan model in planting two *išd* trees, one in the western necropolis and one to the east within the sanctuary (1994, 64). Several deities were associated with the Heliopolitan tree: Hathor is associated with the *išd* tree, but there may have been an earlier tree goddess at Heliopolis whom she replaced (Buhl 86). At another location very near to Heliopolis, there was a shrine for Ius'as (*Jw.s-ʿ3.s*), a personification of the god's hand and counterpart of the sun-god Atum, with an associated sacred acacia

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[144] 'Muslims recommended the use of a brew made by boiling the leaves of the tree for nasal trouble, lumbago or pain in the knee. Christians prescribe it for snakebites, toothache and as an antidote for poison. Little wonder that the tree is devoid of foliage today' (Kamil 2004). As Meinardus reported, in the year 2000 the National Egyptian Heritage Revival Association allocated LE.5 million to regenerate the area around the tree... 'Moreover, because of the interreligious significance of the tree, NEHRA has built a mosque near the site' (Meinardus 2002, 90).

[145] The identification of modern species remains problematic: the *išd* tree may be *Balanites aegyptiaca* Del., while the *šw3b* may be *Mimusops schimperi* Hochst (Koemoth 1994, 280).

tree (Kákosy 1977, 1112; Buhl 86). From the New Kingdom onwards, Atum, Seshat and most commonly Thoth are depicted on temple walls inscribing royal names on the leaves of the *išd* tree (Thoth: Redford 1986, 66 n. 11). It is probable that the cult of the *išd* tree was maintained through the Late Period.

During the Graeco-Roman period, cultivation of balsam bushes may have replaced or supplemented the sacred tree cult; according to Josephus, Cleopatra planted balsam groves at Heliopolis, using cuttings from Jericho. Sir John Mandeville's *Travels* describes balsam bushes in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, used to make chrism (holy oil) for the Church; the sources for this compendium (see Burnett 2003, 69) stated that their Muslim informants insisted that the trees were tended only by Christians, or else the balm was unobtainable (Mandeville 1900, 33-34; 2005, 65-66). Strabo describes Heliopolis circa 20-30 BC in a deserted state, still crushed by the effects of the Persian invasion of 525 BC (*Geography* 17.1.27), with no mention of trees. The Coptic Synaxarion, the sixth century Arabic Infancy Gospel or Apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, the fourth century Ethiopian Synaxarion, and the Qur'an (19:23-25) also mention a holy tree or trees in this place (Meinardus 2002, 90; Doresse 1960, 29). Its principle association is with the Virgin Mary, considered to have rested under it together with Jesus, Joseph and Salome the midwife on the Flight into Egypt.[146] In the middle ages, in addition to the evidence from Mandeville already mentioned, there are reports from the burgeoning pilgrims' accounts of balsam trees (Burchard of Mount Sion, *c.*1283; Grabois 2000, 83; see also Cannuyer 1984), a palm tree (Sanuto, 1321, and Poloner, 1421), a 'garden of balm' (Tafur, 1435-39) and an immense fig tree (Fabri, *c.*1480). Arabic witnesses include 'Abd al-Latif (1161-1231) in his *Account of Egypt* (Meinardus 1965, 228). The sycamore tree planted in 1672 survived until 1906, when a shoot was taken from it and cultivated as a new tree. In the Ottoman period, its size and fame continued to draw local and foreign visitors, including Flaubert, Nerval and Brugsch. It was inscribed with its own biography, in the form of numerous graffiti carved

[146] At Bilbais, there seems to be a similar transference of Christian tradition on to an existing tree cult: 'During the Middle Ages, the pilgrims to the Holy Places, who passed through Egypt, stopped at Bilbais to kneel at the foot of the great tree, which according to both Christians and Muslims, commemorates the stay of the Holy Family at Bilbais' (Meinardus 1965, 449).

into the trunk and branches (Meinardus 2002, 92). Today, the tree is covered in pieces of knotted cloth, and leaves are removed for preparing various medicines. The tree is a year round pilgrimage destination, with thousands attending the *mawlid* on 14 Shaaban each year at the time McPherson lived in Egypt (1941, 248-51).[147]

The history of the Matariya tree appears to contain the following elements: a well-established use of parts of trees in pharaonic medical practice; various local traditions of the veneration of a sacred tree, derived either from pharaonic belief in the residence of a deity in the tree or the symbolic properties of its leaves; the planting of valuable oil or sap-producing balsam trees at the end of the Ptolemaic period; the appropriation of these trees for the production of a complex and sacred oil used in Coptic religious ceremonies, combined with the integration of a single palm, sycamore or fig tree into the tradition of the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. 'The' tree itself must and can be periodically renewed, as happened most recently in 2000 when a new tree was planted (Meinardus 2002, 92).

Kákosy (1989, 267), Doresse (1960, 27), and others have all pointed to the *išd* tree of Heliopolis and the cult of the Virgin's Tree at Matariya as a clear example of the persistence of cult. The palimpsestual geography of the Matariya tree, where one tree is superimposed time after time in the same ground, attests to a more precise continuity: it indicates *the persistence of the underlying idea of the votive offering placed upon a tree in order to communicate with a divinity.* The process by which this happens is fluid, confused, and characterized by syncretistic beliefs in more than one tree, and in more than one precise location, and it demonstrates the transmission and recombination of specific elements of ancient tree cults.

The above review of the extant examples of sacred trees in Egypt suggests that trees have retained their religious significance in many local saints' cults, and occasionally as the

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[147] McPherson also argued that Shamm al-Nasim, the spring festival, as celebrated at Matariya, was 'a remnant of the cult of the Sun-god Ra ...Those who doubt it should visit Mataria...before dawn on that day and see the crowds who have slept in the fields and the roads to see the sun rise near the obelisk which marks the site of the temple of Ra' (1941, 5).

focus of trans-regional pilgrimage cults; that Copts as well as Muslims participate in these practices, and that the Copts have associated a female figure with a particular tree cult at Heliopolis, contrasting with the majority of other trees which are associated with male sheikhs. General commentary about the cult of trees in the modern period and its probable ancient origins can be found in Blackman (1924), Hornblower (1930), Kees (1961, 78-80), Ayrout (1963, 94), Kákosy (1989, 267 and 1990, 177), and El Daly (2005, 91). Writers with a passing interest in the subject often refer to sheikhs' tombs and their sacred trees to be found 'up and down the country' (Hornblower 18), suggesting that there are, or were, many more undocumented examples.

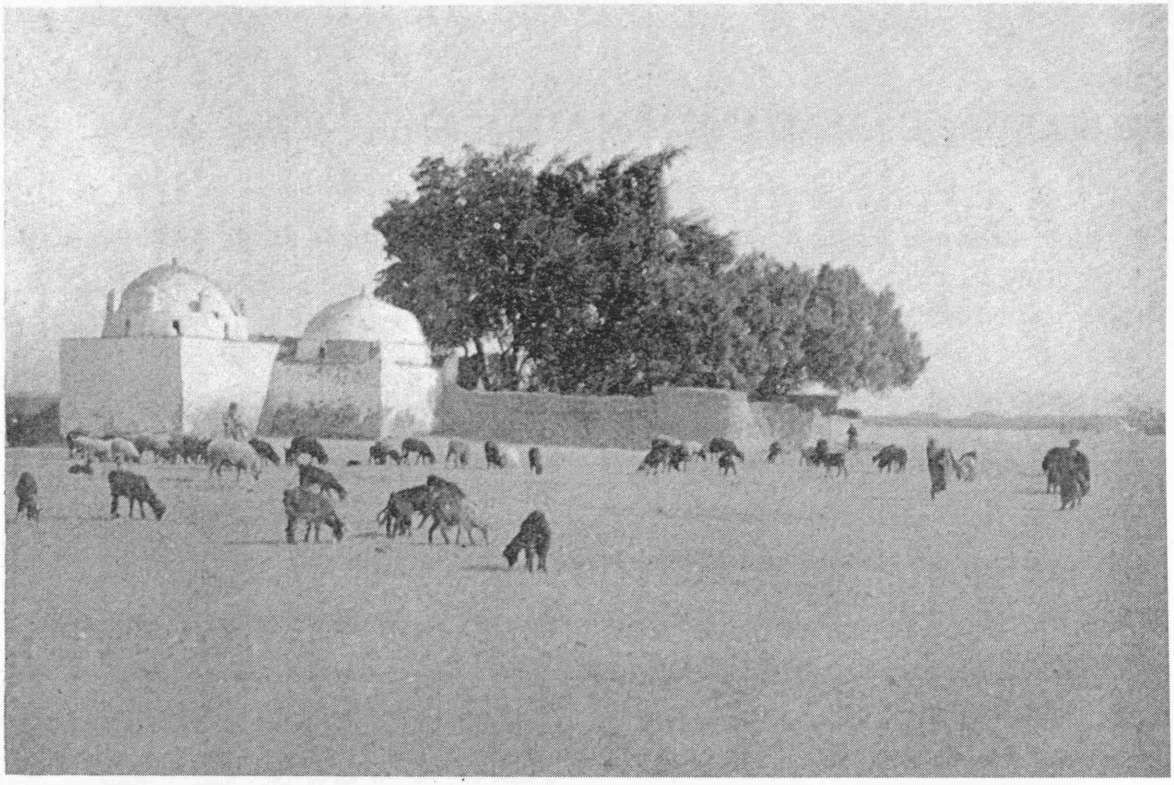

Figure 61 Two *qubbas* and a walled grove of trees, near Bet Khallaf

From Kees 1961, pl. 5b

Figure 62 Tomb of Sheikh Abu Hashima in the desert near Shantur, Beni Suef province, *c*.1920s

W Blackman, unpublished, Wellcome Library L0044822. Caption in WB's hand on reverse: 'He is a saint of great renown and crowds come to visit his tomb every Friday'

Figure 63 Sacred trees of Sheikh Abu Hashima, *c*.1920s

W Blackman, unpublished, Wellcome Library L0044820

4.1.3 Knotted cloths on trees

The value of these saints' trees lies in the curative properties of the leaves, which are drawn from the powers of the sheikh. These powers are usually invoked by knotting pieces of cloth around the branches of the tree. Physical attachment and materialized desires are the key aspects of these pieces of cloth, rather than the knots themselves. Küchler's use (2001) of knot theory, a branch of topology, to illuminate the ethnography of *to'o* figures and *malanggan* carvings in New Ireland, is concerned with these objects firstly as 'artworks' (73) and secondly with the mathematical aspects of the spaces and patterns integrated by the knot. She suggests this 'momentary integration of distinct domains of experience' as a possible reason for the widespread use of the knot as contractual object (68), which is its principal function in modern Egypt. Wendrich's recent work on knots in ancient Egypt has defined four types of knot (stopper, linear, circular, fabric), and found that linear knots in particular 'represent tangible proof that words have been spoken and rites have been acted out: they are the material residue of volatile words and performances' (2006, 253). Wendrich further argues that the connotations of knots and knotting in Egyptian funerary, mythological, and magical literature are unequivocally positive, and differentiates these knots from the language and depiction of binding or fettering. Those who are said to perform the knotting are a series of gods (Isis, Re, Seth, Nun, Anubis, Tait, and the seven daughters of Re); based on this evidence she suggests it was the human counterparts of these gods who created the knots – i.e. the magician or priest (264). This brings knotting into a high cultural domain, but the problem with this argument is that a knot is one of the most democratic of magical objects – anyone can make one - and it is probable that access to this kind of magical procedure was not restricted to the priestly class.

If knot theory alludes to the contractual aspect of knots, *memoria* theory gives insight into the way in which the rags and nails in sheikhs' trees call up past history. At one end of the spectrum of the knowledge-bearing aspect of knots lie the well-known Andean *khipus*, knotted record-keeping and message sending devices used by the Inka (though not yet fully 'translated' or understood; see Urton 1998 for a discussion of the *khipu* recording system as a form of writing).

Figure 64 Cotton *Khipu*

UR 40; 32-30-30 54, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Photo courtesy of Peabody Museum

The knotted rags in Egypt, however, must be considered in context, and as will be seen they are linked to a set of location-specific factors, and within a historical framework of tomb visitation.

Certain aspects of the practices associated with saints' trees indicate variations and nuances, from which it is clear that either some of the data is unreliable, or that there are genuinely distinct local traditions. Comparable variations are found in the conflicting traditions about the *qarin* and *qarina* (Seligman 1913; Hornblower 1923; Padwick 1923-25; Hornblower 1923; Blackman 1926*b*).[148] According to Blackman's informants, the soul of the sheikh is understood to have *entered* the tree, but is only present there on Thursday or Friday when the weekly visit is paid to the sheikh's tomb or cemetery (1925,

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[148] The debate centred on whether the 'double' (*qarin*, *qarina*) of a person was of the same or the opposite sex; some observers argued that beliefs in the Delta differed from Middle and Upper Egypt, others that educated informants held different beliefs from uneducated, or that it depended on the gender of the informant (Blackman 1926*b*).

57). Visitors interact with the tree in different ways: removing leaves and branches following the appropriate propitiatory prayers, eating fruit from the tree, or inserting nails with hair attached into the tree trunk (see Figure 65). Buhl understood the pieces of cloth to represent *answered* prayers, just as she stated that the nails were driven into the tree when a headache had been cured (1947, 86). Lane also observed the practice of driving nails into the wooden door of Bab Zuweyleh in Cairo, where the legendary saint known as the Kutb was thought to dwell (1860, 230-1). These practices probably relate to the method for curing chronic neuralgia recorded by Legrain in the 1940s in Luxor, in which a nail was driven into the base of the skull, often causing serious complications (Legrain 1945, 96).[149] Blackman recorded the belief that many of the sheikhs' trees marked the spot where a sheikh had been murdered, following which a clay figure made in his image was buried there; eventually, a tree grew from the disintegrating clay figure (1924, 57). Finally, Padwick recorded a kind of parity between *jinn* and saints at sacred trees in the Delta: 'Such a tree [occupied by the *jinn*] will be used in the same way as a saint-haunted one, and barren women will walk round and round it praying for conception, and buffaloes with insufficient milk may also be led round it' (1923-5, 436). This evidence from the Delta suggests that the identity of the power within the tree is somewhat fluid.

An alternative practice, which takes a similar form of hanging strips of paper on a tree, was recorded by Sengers in her fieldwork among the women of Cairo in the late twentieth century. She describes a form of magic known as *''amal bis-shagara'* (magic with the tree). Her informant stated that 'A married woman who loves another man a lot, for instance, and wants to get rid of her own husband, she has something like this done ... The sheikh writes something on a piece of paper, which she immediately has to hang up in a tree out of sight. The wind makes the branch of the tree wave to and fro and everything she likes comes to her and her own husband goes crazy' (Sengers 2003, 48). This practice seems to be a natural progression from the belief in the power of the sheikh, and the power of trees.

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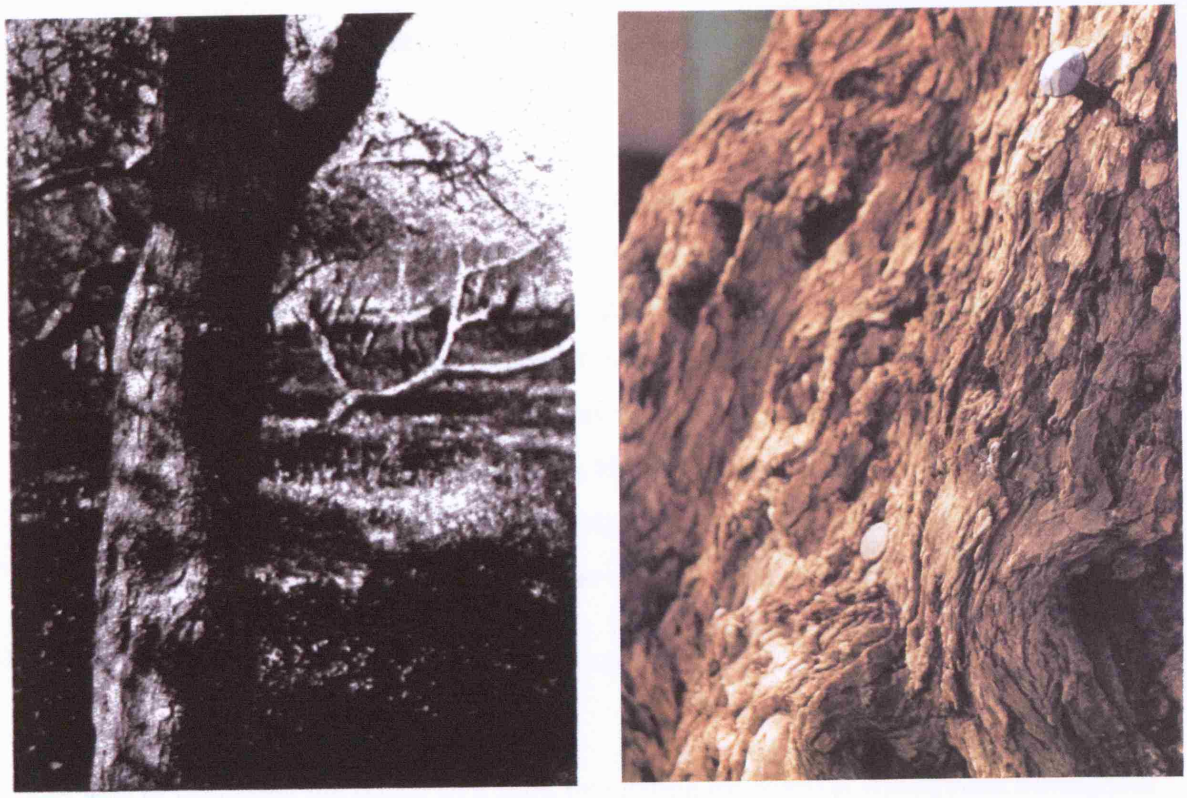
[149] No evidence of the use of nails or similar objects driven into trees, associated with curing headaches, has been identified in the pre-Islamic period; for general comments on the ancient Egyptian treatment of headache, see Karenberg and Leitz 2001.



A Tree at Nezlet Batran near Giza, 1930

B Tree of Abul Qasim Abu 'Ali in Akhmim, 1990

Figure 65 Trees with offerings of iron nails

A: from Hornblower 1930, fig. 1; B: from Biegman 1990, fig. 60

Comparable customs associated with tying material onto trees have been gathered by a number of folklorists. Walhouse found a significant number of variants of the 'rag-bush' practice in the Muslim world from India, Persia, Central Asia, China and Africa (1880, 97-106). In the fine detail, local variations may take the form of choosing bushes or trees near where someone has died a violent death, or near the burial place of a saint, or a sacred spring. The meaning and intention of the custom has long been understood as being 'sometimes votive and sometimes commemorative, a mark of respect or worship, or an offering to avert evil or show gratitude for benefits received' (1880, 97); Dafni found a total of seventeen different reasons for tying rags on trees in contemporary northern Israel (2002). Only in Grinsell's recent description of rag-bushes in Cyprus has it been suggested that all strata of society participate in the custom, according to an analysis of

the rags (1990, 227); elsewhere, it has been generally assumed that this is a custom of the poor.

As the number of worldwide instances of putting rags on trees swelled, a single explanatory framework was sought. Hartland seems to have arrived at the simplest and clearest thesis, extrapolated from the reasoning behind the use of clothing in witchcraft: he argued, 'If an article of clothing in a witch's hands may cause me to suffer, the same article in contact with a beneficent power may relieve my pain, restore my health, or promote my general prosperity' (1893, 466). He then suggested that when a piece of clothing, and eventually just cloth or rag, is placed on the bush or tree, it is in continual contact with the divinity which resides in that tree, 'and the effluence of divinity, reaching and involving it, will reach and involve me... In this way I may become permanently united with the god' (466).

The idea of accessing the power of a saint by visiting his tomb is widespread throughout the Muslim world, from the sanctuaries of *awliya'* (holy men) found alongside or within cemeteries elsewhere in the Maghrib (Brown 1991, 124),[150] to the tombs of the Kadiri brothers at Bidjapur, visited by Muslims and Hindus alike (Burton-Page 1991, 127), just as Copts and Muslims transcend orthodox practice and sometimes share saints or trees. In India pieces of cloth are tied onto tombs: as Burton-Page observed, 'Many tombs have the reputation of curing various ailments through the thaumaturgic power of a *pir* [holy man] persisting; e.g. women still tie ribbons on the lattice screens on the tomb of Salim Čishti at Fathpur Sikri as a cure for barrenness' (1991, 127). The distinctive features of the modern Egyptian practice are the three elements: the saint's tomb, the tree, and the tying on of rags to the tree.

[150] Brown notes that the presence of the holy men's sanctuaries partly accounts for the mysterious quality attributed to cemeteries in the Maghrib (1991, 124).

4.1.4 Tree cults in dynastic Egypt

Trees, deities, the dead and healing are found associated in various permutations during the dynastic period. Firstly, two female deities, Hathor and Nut, are widely referred to in the context of their various sacred trees, such as the Memphite sycamore or date palm in texts from the Old Kingdom (Billing 2002; 2004). Together with Isis, these deities are frequently depicted in tomb scenes and on stelae as tree goddesses from the New Kingdom onwards (Buhl 1947, 92). By this point the previously separate functions of tree goddess and mortuary deity could be combined, as in these tomb paintings.

Figure 66 Tree goddess nourishing the deceased, from the Tomb of Pashedu, TT3, Deir el-Medina

The relationship between the deceased and the tree was conceptualised as the deceased drawing nourishment from the tree, or from the deity within the tree. These images reflected or substituted for real trees planted at the entrance to some private tombs, echoed on a larger scale by the great tree-plantings at royal mortuary temples such as the trees at the temple of Snofru's pyramid at Dahshur, or the avenues of perseas (*Mimusops laurifolia*, Egyptian *šw3b*) leading to the temples of Mentuhotep II and Hatshepsut at Deir

el-Bahari (Germer 2001, 4). The *ba* could also perch within the tree (e.g. Cairo JE 88.877).

This idea is elaborated in the *Tale of the Two Brothers*, in which drops of blood from the hero Bata, who is in the form of a bull, become two persea trees containing his essence and from which a single splinter impregnates the king's wife (Hollis, 1990; Simpson 1972, 80-91). Another concrete association between the dead and trees appears in the branches, leaves and fruit of the *šw3b* which have been found on mummies and in tombs (Malaise 1995, 134 n. 21).

Besides this mortuary association of trees, there was a widespread network of sacred trees throughout Egypt. In the late temples, including Edfu (Wilson 1997, 528), comprehensive geographical texts list the sacred trees of each nome, growing on the divine mounds (*i3t-ntr*). Like the network of burial places of Osiris that had developed by the Late Period, Egypt was also chequered with sacred trees. In certain contexts, the tree stood alone as a divinity rather than the representation of one, such as the dom-palm in the Book of the Dead in TT 290 (Saleh 1984, 34 and n. 248), and the three sacred trees of Behdet (*Edfou* II, 25, col. 209-211).

To take one tree as an example, the sycamore, *Ficus sycomorus L.* (Egyptian *nht*) was held to be sacred in various parts of Egypt; for example in the 4th and 7th Lower Egyptian nomes according to the geographical texts at Edfu (Wilson 1997, 528). Sycamore fruit, leaves and sap were used in medicine (Wilson, 528). The same kind of connection, between religious and medical values, can be seen in the Tebtunis hieratic papyri dating from the second century AD. Among the *materia sacra*, composed of holy places, waters and animals, sanctuaries, forms of goddesses, and the hierarchy of the gods, particular lists of trees are to be found in *P. Tebt.* H I, the great onomasticon, *P. Tebt.* H II, III and IV (Osing 1998, 141, 150-154). In the major onomasticon *P. Tebt.* H I, various species (the Dornakazie, the Christ's Thorn, the *išd-* tree and the *ksbt*-tree) are alluded to, and a few locations may be identified (Athribis, Crocodilopolis, Hermopolis, Heliopolis, Luxor). While the location of some of these holy trees seems to have been within the precinct of temples, this in no way excludes the possibility of other trees in the

landscape possessing sanctity, but the evidence does not survive archaeologically or textually to support this suggestion.

The second association between trees and the dead is found in the multiple forms expressing aspects of the god Osiris. According to Koemoth, the concept of the primordial mound and the 'tree of the horizon' underlay the development of 'buttes arborées' (*i3wt ntrj,* divine mounds, or *i3wt Wsir,* mounds of Osiris) sheltering a mummy of the god (1994, XIV; 57-64). Examples or depictions of such mounds exist at Abydos, at the Late Period Tomb C81, at Acanthopolis, Heracleopolis Magna and Memphis. Chthonian and vegetal aspects of Osiris were gradually brought together from separate points of origin. From the Ramesside period onwards the iconography of 'Osiris in a tree' developed, seen initially on the walls of private Theban tombs and later on Third Intermediate Period coffins (Koemoth 163).[151] The image is generally interpreted as an expression of solar rebirth. Osiris is also described as he 'who is worshipped in the *naret*-tree, That grew up to bear his *ba*' in a literary version of this concept, found in the hymn inscribed on the 18th Dynasty Stela of Amenmose (Louvre C 286; trans Lichtheim 1976, 81).[152] In the second century AD, Osiris was still being depicted within a tree, possibly intended to represent the *mnt3* grove, as on the relief from the Gate of Hadrian at the temple of Philae (Figure 67 below). Local tree cosmogonies related to different parts of the cycle of Osirian myth – for example the soul of Osiris was thought to reside in the branches of the *iwy* tree, as at Bigeh where there was a weekly ceremonial visit by Isis in the Graeco-Roman period. Plutarch relates that Bigeh 'is usually untrodden and unapproached by any man, and not even birds come down on it nor do fish come near it; but at one appointed time the priests come over and sacrifice there to the dead god, laying garlands on his tomb. This is shaded by a *methis*-plant loftier than any olive-tree' (trans. Griffiths 1970, 149-50).[153] The most southerly tree-cult, of Thoth of Pnubs (referring to

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[151] Examples include an unpublished Dynasty 22 coffin in Lisbon (Koemoth 140-3, fig. 12), and a Dynasty 23 coffin in Cairo 1868/1899 (Koemoth 143-5, fig. 13).
[152] The *nᶜrt* tree has been identified with a number of different species: Loret thought it was an oleander, Newberry suggested a pomegranate; Koemoth rightly argues that the evidence is too sparse for a convincing identification (1994, 194).
[153] Plutarch's *methis*-plant has not been identified.

the *nbs* tree), is also documented as late as the 3rd century AD at el-Dakka (Dijkstra 2005, 76).

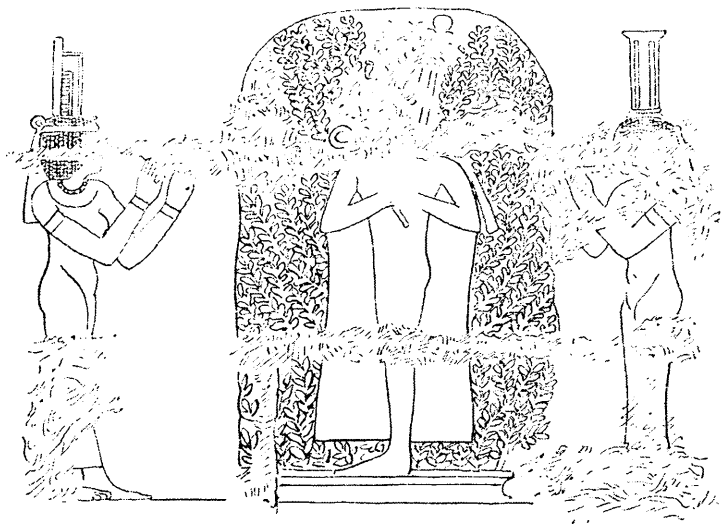

Figure 67 Osiris in the *mnt3* grove, from a relief at the temple of Philae; 2nd c AD

From Junker 1913, 54 fig. 18

Returning for a moment to the tomb of Djer at Abydos, we find another significant confluence between tomb, tree and divinity: the *Pḳr* tree. As a place-name, it is generally accepted that *Pḳr* is to be identified with Umm el-Qaab (Lavier 1989; Leahy 1989). From a number of references to texts found on funerary stelae, Schäfer (1904) argued that *pḳr*-trees were attached to various tombs supposed to contain parts of the body of Osiris; these groves may look back at a particular tree or grove sited at Umm el-Qaab. Given that the tomb of Djer acquired symbolic status as the tomb of Osiris by the Middle Kingdom, the original *pḳr*-tree(s) may have grown there from at least as early as this period. In the Saite period, a text expresses the concept of the soul of the deceased, who has become an Osiris, wandering among the great trees of *Pḳr* (Schäfer 1904, 108).[154]

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[154] 'Deine Seele wandelt mit den grossen Bäumen von *W-pḳ*' (Schäfer 1904, 108, citing P. Berlin 8351, III, 15-16). Blackman notes that 'At Abydos also there was a sacred grove of trees where, according to a demotic papyrus in the Berlin Museum, water was poured out in libation to Osiris on 365 altars set up under "the great trees" of the grave' (1926*a*, 53).

Thus the concept of the god being *within* the tree is clearly expressed in dynastic religious thought. Male and female gods may also be *under* the tree, as in epithets such as 'He who is under his *ksb.t* tree', (Sopdu,[155] Sobek), 'He who is under his moringa tree',[156] or 'Hathor who is under her sycamore trees'.[157]

Blackman identified a connection between this concept of *Einwohnung* and the similar belief shown by the fellahin she worked with in the 1920s: where there was a sheikh's tomb and a tree, the soul of the sheikh was believed to have gone into the tree. In the case of the graves of ordinary people, she found a different belief: that their souls took the form of small green birds which gathered on the branches of the trees nearby (2000 [1927], 121). In her brief studies of this phenomenon she did not relate the sheikhs' tree cults to similar practices outside Egypt. Her familiarity with ancient Egyptian concepts, gained through many years of fieldwork alongside her brother, the Egyptologist A M Blackman, led her to suggest a possible relationship with the Egyptian concept of the *ba*. This hypothesis was made long before the rich data was presented by Koemoth giving a picture of multiple meanings of Osiris's manifestation within various trees, which has underlined the ubiquity of trees in the textual and archaeological record of the dynastic period. The data on ancient tree cults is presented in relation to formal religious belief and is therefore defined as high knowledge; data on modern tree cults, without textual evidence to support it but potentially a far richer source for information about practice, is presented as heterodox, "folk", low knowledge.

The practice of tree veneration is historically persistent in Egypt, with a constant connection between the meaning of place (cemetery, tomb), thaumaturgic individual (divinity, sheikh), soul (*ba*, spirit of the sheikh) and tree. Accessing the power of the thaumaturgic individual for personal ends (nurture, healing, fertility) was expressed through planting trees close to tombs and engaging in forms of votive behaviour, such as prayer and tying on rags to the trees. Clearly much more extensive evidence survives for

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[155] Eg CT, VII, 33h, spell 832.
[156] In the Pyramid Texts (Buhl 1947, 86-7; Koemoth 252 n. 915).
[157] Eg CT, VI, 342f, spell 710. For Re-Horakhty as a tree-god on a Ramesside stela from Dahamsha, see Ogdon 1981.

'high-cultural' tree worship in dynastic than in post-dynastic Egypt, in the form of interconnecting cosmogonies which nonetheless are basically a synthesis of the cults of many local gods. In the Nile Valley the sheikh's tomb is usually located on the fringe of the desert, within sight of the ancient tombs, so it is possible to read in the siting of the sheikh's tomb a pattern of replication of the ancient arrangement of tomb and tree in the otherwise treeless landscape. The origins of this arrangement may lie in turn at *Pḳr*, at the tomb of Osiris.

Figure 68 Votive offerings on a holy tree near Merg

From McPherson 1941, pl. opp. 250

The 'folk' practice of knotting cloth on trees has multiple points of origin; diffusion seems improbable except on a local scale, which may have had the effect of creating slight yet characteristic variations within geographical regions. It is likely that it predates Islamic culture, was transmitted successfully and became incorporated into local religious practice even when frowned upon by orthodox Islam, as in the case of *mawlid*s and *ziyara*s which will be discussed in Section 4.2. The practice seems to fit particularly closely into a number of culturally embedded ancient Egyptian mythological conceptions,

connected with the dwelling of a divinity or deceased individual in trees, in locations which are both sacred and liminal. The inclusion of tombs and trees into Coptic Christian practice,[158] in the case of the *Shajarat Maryam* at Matariya and the cult at Bilbais (p. 208-11 and n. 146 above), establishes a broad historical link between ancient and Islamic Egypt. This fits into (rather than being undermined by) a wider pattern in the transition from the *jahiliya* to Islam: 'Saints' tombs and "re-incorporated pre-Islamic sanctuaries" became of prime importance in many areas of the Muslim world' (Insoll 1999, 183). The most problematic aspect of this interpretation of the relationship between present and past lies in the lack of clear evidence for dating the progression of the Egyptian tree cults, and perhaps in the reduction in number of sacred trees and lack of discernible pattern therein. It is possible that the major reduction in number had already taken place by the time the Tebtunis lists were compiled, or that those listed therein only signified trees with the highest level of sanctity, and that there were far greater numbers of locally sacred trees.

Bloch has argued that 'the symbolic power of trees comes from the fact that they are good substitutes for humans... Their substitutability is due to their being different, yet continuous with humans, in that both "share" life' (1998, 40). This insight provides a general explanation for why trees were incorporated into a wide spectrum of religious thought in ancient Egypt, and into the practice of popular religion and healing in modern Egypt. More defined correspondences can be identified in the transfer of the deceased's identity into the tree; the existence of a large network of sacred trees, each associated with a local god or saint; the practice of communicating with this god or saint, through votive offerings of knotted cloth in the modern period, and prayers and libations in the ancient period. In the modern period, all textual and iconographic evidence explaining the nature of these Egyptian tree cults is lacking. Furthermore, Frazer's piecemeal treatment and incorporation of Egyptian tree cults into his grand thesis of *rex Nemorensis* (Frazer 1906-

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[158] The *Theodosian Code* also contains prohibitions on 'rag-trees': slaughter of animals was forbidden in C. Th.16.10.10, and then 'the prohibition was extended the following year to domestic and rural cults, forbidding burning incense, lighting candles in honour of the lares, hanging garlands on sacred trees, and making offerings on improvised turf altars (C.Th. 16.10.12). This was the official end of public as well as private forms of pagan sacrifices' (Caseau 2001, 29).

15, 1936; Fraser 1990) may lie behind anthropologists' reluctance to engage in their study. They have become a typical exemplar of low knowledge.[159] By contrast, trees in ancient Egyptian culture have received extended treatments, even though most of their documentation is filtered through formal sources such as tomb paintings or formal religious texts.

These observations of the durability of ritual behaviour incorporating the veneration of trees lead to some tentative hypotheses about transmission. Transmission of specific cultural practice may occur when people have access to places in the landscape believed to be sacred, where there is a symbolic entity, such as a tree, which acts as the focus of their desires – in other words where the numinous is at work. It may occur where an idea is so powerful that it transcends orthodox religious practice, and the idea of Osiris/ Hathor/Nut/the Virgin Mary/the deceased sheikh embodied by a living tree is such an idea. The means of communication, involving pious visitation and the offering of a gift in return for spiritual or physical benefit, is relatively simple. Finally, the location of this communication is based (and therefore may have survived more successfully) on the edges of the quotidian landscape, in the classical liminal zone or border between the cultivation and the desert.[160]

Besides dwelling beside and within trees, the Islamic holy man occasionally chose to occupy a pharaonic tomb, where his cult might replace that of an intervening Christian anchorite. This process echoes the more frequent development of temple, into church, into mosque. The transformation of many pharaonic tombs into Christian eremitic dwellings has been noted above, together with continuities between dynastic and Christian practice, in symbolic communication about death, life, and sacrifice. I will argue that the *paucity* of examples of sheikhs' tombs or cults located in pharaonic tombs points to the pattern of dispersion of mortuary cult, which was rerouted into tree cults, new tombs within Islamic cemeteries, *mawlid*s and the *ziyara*.

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[159] This situation was partly remedied by the 1996 conference in Wye, Kent, on trees and wood as social symbols, published in Rival 1998, although it did not include fieldwork in the Middle East, nor studies of ancient tree cults.
[160] Heliopolis/Matariya is a notable exception.

4.1.5 Islamic reoccupation of pharaonic structures

Par ailleurs, on constate que des siècles plus tard, les Arabes vont parfois se réapproprier symboliquement les sites antiques abandonées en y installant le tombeau d'un personnage saint, ou en leur conférant un nom ayant une consonance quasi mythique, comme les toponymes en al-Nur, Nimrud, al-Banat. Il est souvent difficile de dater cette réoccupation symbolique des sites anciens, d'autant que les toponymes aussi bien que les noms des cheikhs peuvent changer assez fréquemment.

(Björnesjö 1998, 297)

Not only is it difficult to date the Muslim saints' reoccupation of pharaonic structures as Björnesjö observes, but it is also difficult to identify these structures in the monumental record. The toponyms incorporating references to saints may refer to whole villages, or the burial place of the saint – only in a limited number of cases (outlined below) can we link an Islamic saint during life to a pharaonic tomb. The problem of the removal of evidence for Islamic reinhabitation of tombs (such as graffiti and objects of daily life) may have distorted our understanding of this practice, which arguably reflects Christian tomb occupation and may comment on it through the language of appropriation. Until the evidence of post-conquest occupation is properly recorded as part of normal survey and excavation practice, it cannot be confidently stated that the tradition of living in a tomb was suspended, but current information suggests that this is the case. Two striking exceptions to this rule are the tombs of Sheikh 'Abd al-Qurna and Sidi Hamad Sam'am.

During the 1912-14 excavations at the Monastery of Jeremiah at Epiphanius, on the high gebel above the road to Deir el-Bahari, Winlock and Crum noted the tomb of Sheikh 'Abd al-Qurna (1926, 16). They recorded that his tomb was believed to 'commemorate' a Christian anchorite, who may have been responsible for the scattered pottery found in the tomb courts (1926, 16; 28), while the monasteries of SS Cyriacus and Epiphanius in turn had been situated quite deliberately in the midst of the densely packed private tombs

constructed from the New Kingdom to the Graeco-Roman period. The identities of the anchorite and the sheikh were blended in their reputation for curing rheumatism.[161]

At Giza, the Fourth dynasty tomb of Debehni (LG 90; P&M III, 1974, 235-6) was later identified as the residence of a local Muslim saint, Sidi Hamad Sam'am (dates unknown). A cult of this saint was documented in the modern period, women and children visiting the tomb 'for its religious benefits' (Wilson 1964, 8). Hassan, who excavated the tomb in the 1930s, describes the *dhikr* (devotional dance) still taking place weekly (1943, 160), while Reisner described the tomb being 'used as a mosque, called "Sheikh Hamid," much frequented on Fridays by the women-folk of the adjacent villages' (1931, 5 n. 4). Wood refers to this evidence of continued popular veneration despite arguing for a basic discontinuity between Islam and the pharaonic past – 'Monuments and icons were meaningless to the observer' (1998, 194). However, the reuse of the tomb of Debehni questions Wood's assertion.

Although the historical information is lost regarding the saint's occupation of the tomb, or that of any possible predecessors, two striking features may relate to the choice of this particular tomb as a cult place. Firstly, the tomb was distinguished by thirteen rock-cut statues of a man with one foot advanced, in the outer chamber. Secondly, the clearance of the tomb revealed reliefs with some of the most complex scenes of dancing that survive in the Giza necropolis. The weekly dancing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (unrecorded in photographs, although compare Figure 69 below) may relate to the images of dancing on the walls of the tomb, as well as to the memory of the sheikh.[162]

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[161] For use of the tomb of Sheikh 'Abd al-Qurna in the late 20th-early 21st centuries, see van der Spek 2007, and Thompson 1996. Thompson notes: - 'Local women who are about to marry walk around the sheikh's sepucher [sic] and leave food offerings for the poor and animals' (1996, 54).

[162] On the custom of funerary dances, performed at the funeral or at the mouth of the tomb, see Spencer 2003, 111-121; 115-116; see also p. 247 below. In Lexova's study of the form and language of ancient Egyptian dance (1935), she dismissed modern dancers 'passing off their art as Egyptian' (71) and saw no connection with any of the movements depicted in the ancient sources.

Figure 69 Workmen dancing at Giza, 3 November 1925

Photographer: Mohammedani Ibrahim. From www.giza.org

Figure 70 Dancing at the tomb of Debehni, with surface 'damage'

From www.giza.org

Hassan's description of the reuse of the tomb was censorious: he writes of 'illiterate peasants [who] have been largely responsible for the deplorable condition of the walls of the tomb, though some of the blame must also rest upon a certain class of tourists (whom one would expect to know better!) and their ignorant guides' (1943, 160). This suggests that he found significant amounts of graffiti, unfortunately not yet recorded. There was also 'the accumulated rubbish of thousands of years', and the walls were 'black and greasy with dirt and the smoke of lamps and candles' (160), indicating possibly long-term occupation.

When he had finished clearing the tomb and secured it with an iron gate, Hassan made an unusual concession, which acknowledged the value and use of the tomb to the local people:

> Access to the tomb was forbidden to all unauthorized persons, except on Friday mornings when it is placed at the disposal of the villagers for the performance of their devotions, which are however, now carried out under the watchful eye of a Government Ghaffir (1943, 160).

A few further examples may be adduced that show the superimposition of the cult of deceased sheikhs on Christian and pharaonic tomb sites. At Deir al-Maimun, the tomb of Sheikh Uways, a companion of Muhammad, was built at the place identified as Antony's 'cave' over which a monastic settlement had grown up (Meinardus 1965, 253). Wipszycka comments:

> ... on comprendra pourquoi les musulmans - à un moment que nous ignorons - ont placé la tombe d'un saint cheikh au sommet d'une tour de ce fort: il s'agissait pour eux de prendre symboliquement possession d'un endroit qui jusqu'alors avait été important pour les chrétiens d'Égypte, de sacraliser un espace qui jusqu'alors avait été l'espace sacré d'une autre religion (Wipszycka 2004*b*, 141).

The hole in the ground enclosed by one of the churches at Deir al-Maimun may make use of a pharaonic tomb as Wipszycka suggests, but it could equally be medieval (2004*b*, 137). Similarly, the tomb of Anba Musa, the 8th c martyred bishop of Ausim (Letopolis), became the tomb of the Muslim sheikh Sidi Musa - but without, as far as we know, a clear pharaonic 'layer' on which these cults were grafted (Meinardus 1965, 92).

High up in the cliffs, opposite the northern end of Elephantine island, sits the tomb of Sheikh Ali Abu al-Hawa, which overlies the earlier monastery known as Dayr Qubbat al-Hawa; this flourished under the Fatimids but was destroyed, probably in the 12th century (Coquin, Martin, Grossmann 1991*b*, 852; Rassart-Debergh 2004, 294). The monastery followed the classic pattern of occupying a group of ancient tombs, probably initially used by a loose confederation of anchorites. Meinardus speculated that the Tomb of Khunes was the nucleus of the community, which was formed by the disciples of the unknown holy man who lived in it (1965, 328). The monastery was dedicated to St George or St Laurentius (Meinardus 1965, 328), and was inscribed with numerous graffiti and drawings of warrior-saints in red paint.

This handful of examples suggests that the ancient tombs were *not* the preferred choice of location of living saints, or of the cult of the ordinary or 'very special dead' in Islamic Egypt. Goldziher (1969) made an intuitive leap which articulates the kind of broad continuity between Islamic saints and the pharaonic dead that I am exploring: as Stauth notes, 'He sees in the fact that an old grave of Osiris was turned into the place of a Muslim saint, a case of mythological foundation of sainthood in Islam, and characterizes it as an "ultimate metamorphosis of an Egyptian perception of god"'(1970, 113, quoted in Stauth 2004, 15). Continuity in a specific choice of burial place – of sheikh, on top of saint, on top of pharaonic burial – is a rarity, but the transformation of a particular cult activity, such as pilgrimage, far more convincing.

Cult pilgrimage to 'Joseph's prison', despite considerable gaps and uncertainty in the evidence, shows a pattern of transference and transformation that is lacking in the evidence for the tomb sites discussed above. The earliest phase of cult activity concerns the vigorous local cult of Imhotep that developed some time before the 26th Dynasty at Saqqara and Memphis, centred on a temple in north Saqqara that has not yet been located (Wildung 1977, 46). By the thirtieth Dynasty Imhotep was a major deity at Memphis, and became identified with Aesclepius – 'Aesclepius the Memphite' figuring in the Hermetica (Fowden 27, n. 86). The deity was known chiefly as a sage, healer and magician, with evidence for his role in magical practice continuing into the 5th c AD. After a gap of five centuries in the evidence, the sanctuary of Imhotep emerges again in the tenth century

account of the antiquarian Ibn Umayl as *Sijn Yusuf*, 'Joseph's Prison', as the temple was known (El Daly 2005, 51).[163] Ibn Umayl seems to have visited the site at least twice. Several other Arab writers mention Abusir as the location of a sanctuary of Imhotep. When Mariette was excavating the Serapeum in 1850-54, the local members of his team called one of the structures the *Sijn Yusuf*. Stricker's seminal article (1943) knit together Ibn Umayl's account, Mariette's sparse yet useful ethnography, and Rhoné's account, *L'Egypte à petites journées* (1877, 257-258) and identified (on paper) the Prison as the same place as the sanctuary of Imhotep.

In the collective desire to identify the sanctuary and find the tomb of so important a figure (in ancient Egyptian history and cult) as Imhotep, the striking evidence of the continuation and transformation of an Egyptian cult into a Muslim cult has been somewhat overlooked. Rhoné's account notes that the prison was still greatly venerated in the nineteenth century, with pilgrims leaving their graffiti on the walls of a small Muslim 'chapel' nearby (1877, 257-258); in Stricker's view, 'Les pèlerinages à l'ancien sanctuaire n'ont pas été abandonés par l'Islam. Joseph a pris la place d'Imhotep; pour le reste, rien n'a changé' (1943, 124). Mariette's workers said they treated the prison with great respect, as did Christians, who venerated it and painted crosses on its walls, which the workers' fathers had often seen. The volume of sand requiring removal prevented Mariette from digging to find the 'tomb' of Joseph which lay beneath the 'prison'. Stricker asked that archaeologists search again for the prison, and make efforts to preserve its Arabic graffiti (118) and to gather the local traditions about it.

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[163] For a discussion of Imhotep 'hiding behind' the representation of Joseph and other figures in the Arabic literary tradition, see Fodor 1976; for Joseph in the Islamic tradition, see Macdonald 1956.

4.2 Mortality, expressed through cult – *Ziyara*, *Tala'* and *Mawlids*

Having looked at saints' trees and tombs, I now want to turn to the wider phenomenon of the *ziyara*, the practice of pious visitation or pilgrimage in the post-Islamic conquest period, and the closely related phenomenon of the Egyptian *Tala'*, the weekly visit to the graves of one's relatives. Principal shared characteristics of these acts are that they are both forms of mortuary cult, and involve a physical displacement of the living person who visits a specific burial spot in the landscape. *Ziyara* and *Tala'* sometimes overlap with the third phenomena, the *mawlid*, or saint's festival, which involves a journey to celebrate the 'birthday' or other special date associated with a saint, while at the same time commemorating one's own dead.[164] Critical differences lie in the greater frequency of the *Tala'* compared with the *ziyara*, the short distance from home to local cemetery for the *Tala'* versus longer distance *ziyara*, the familial relationship of the actors versus the relationship between saint and devotee, and following on from that the desire to remember or appease one's relatives, versus imploring the saint for a blessing or cure. These modern Islamic and Coptic practices will be compared with earlier Christian and pharaonic practices, in the attempt to understand whether they contain elements signifying a historical as well as a geographical relationship between these forms of cult.

4.2.1 *Ziyara*

The general custom of making a visit to a saint's tomb is known as *ziyara*; its primary purpose is to ask for mediation in gaining blessings, so that the saint will intercede and alleviate or cure an illness, a spiritual or a material difficulty. In the 1990s, Sengers found that 'visits to the graves of the saints are condemned by the orthodox as well as fundamentalists, and in some cases also by a few contemporary sufi leaders' (2002, 31).

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[164] *Mawlid*, meaning birthday, often marks the day of the saint's death or 'birth into Paradise', as it has done with the cult of martyred Christian saints, e.g. St Polycarp (d. c. AD 155) (Turner and Turner 1978, 158). Mayeur-Jouen (1997, 212), discussing Coptic *mawlids* in the late 20th century, distinguishes 'parish pilgrimages', sometimes termed *rihla* (excursions), from journeys to *mawlids*, which she justifies on a semantic basis (simply the existence of two words, *ziyarat* and *mawlid*); but as I suggest above, historically these visits are clearly related practices.

The opposition between high and low cultural practice evidenced by orthodox Muslim rejection of saint veneration is echoed by modern scholarship's resistance to the study of the *ziyara* as an important historical practice (Taylor 1999, 3).[165] Nonetheless, the *ziyara* is a deeply embedded, popular and widespread practice. Ayrout pinpointed one reason for the popularity of visiting a sheikh's tomb: 'More frequented and more popular than the mosque, because there are no distinctions as to age or sex, is the tomb of the patron saint of the village, who is called *wali*, *shayka*[166] or *sidi* so and so' (Ayrout 1963, 93-94); in other words a field of social amnesty operates around the tomb, and all visitors feel equally welcome to communicate with the powerful dead.

Ziyara seems to have had a different origin and trajectory from the *Hajj* and *'umra*, the great and lesser pilgrimages to Mecca made mandatory by the Prophet. Rather than being a distinct Islamic innovation, the visiting of saints' tombs appears to be a syncretistic development which emerged out of ancient, Christian and Jewish practices.

Specific instances of pilgrimage lineages in Egypt have been noted above, namely the Christian pilgrimage in honour of Moses reprising the ancient pilgrimage associated with Osiris at Abydos (p. 187 above), and the pilgrimage to Joseph's Prison continuing the pilgrimage to the cult place of Imhotep. The development of the cult of saints in the Christian period requires brief consideration, in particular Peter Brown's influential study (1981). Brown argued that the two-tiered model of 'elite' versus 'popular' religious expression, led historians to assume incorrectly that the rise of the cult of saints 'must have been the result of the capitulation by the enlightened elites of the Christian church to modes of thought previously current only among the "vulgar"' (1981, 17). He emphasized what he saw as fundamental *change* across the whole Christian world, arguing strongly against continuity thus: 'We have developed a romantic nostalgia for what we fondly

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[165] 'In part, the dearth of attention reflects the bias of the textual sources on which scholars usually rely. It also derives from a now outdated two-tier model of cultural discourse borrowed from the study of Western history. This view, echoing the perception of devout Muslim scholars, counterpoises "elite" and "popular" expressions of religious experience as a useful distinction, and focuses on "high" cultural traditions to the exclusion of what have been dismissively, even derisively, identified as corrupted versions of "popular religion"' (Taylor 1999, 3).

[166] Sic; the original French publication (1938, *Moeurs et coutumes des fellahs*), has '*cheikh*'.

wish to regard as the immemorial habits of the Mediterranean countryman, by which every "popular" religious practice is viewed as an avatar of classical paganism' (20). In so doing, he saw no precedent or even comparanda for the exploration of the dialectic between life and death at the saint's tomb, noting the 'geyserlike force with which belief in miracles of healing at the tombs or in connection with the relics of the martyrs burst out throughout the Mediterranean world' (75). But, Brown's 'geyser' could be seen as a long established steadily bubbling stream at many centres of healing in Egypt presided over by a god, king or saint, in which their body was a focus of intense piety – Osiris, Amenhotep son of Hapu, Imhotep.[167] These superior conduits to divine or magical power existed within a massive web of tombs which were the site of profound dialogue between the living and the dead in the dynastic period. These relationships, ubiquitous in the Egyptian landscape, are surely an important precursor of the intimate relationship between late antique men (Brown's usage) and saint, which Brown identifies as a significant change from previous intimate relationships with divine figures (55, discussing Paulinus of Nola and his patron saint, Felix). Brown rejected the idea of the relationship with the patron saint replacing the relationship with the old gods as 'too inert a model for the change' (60); I would argue that the 'new' relationship with the Christian saint looked back towards, and fused together personal relationships with deceased relatives, a multiplicity of local gods, and the inherent sanctity of a network of physical places, and that it co-existed with and overlay these pre-existent patterns.

Just as in the Dynastic and Roman/Late Antique periods, it appears to have been unnecessary to prescribe this kind of pilgrimage, and it survived considerable opposition and attempts at suppression between the 12th- 14th centuries in the Islamic lands.

The *kutub al-ziyarat*, pilgrimage guides, have received considerable attention in recent literature, but these guides were written for 'learned pilgrims' (Meri 2002, 526) and have tended to obscure the reality of wide participation of non-literate, female as well as male,

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[167] See Malek 2000; Wildung 1969, 1977a and 1977b. For the 'deification' of other private individuals in ancient Egypt, see Rowe 1940, and further bibliography in Quaegebeur 1977, 135 n. 31. Quaegebeur sees a number of intermediaries between the people and the gods emerging from the New Kingdom onwards (1977, 137).

individuals and groups who did not visit holy places with guide-book in hand. The normative version of *ziyara* transmitted by the *kutub al-ziyarat* of Ibn 'Uthman, Ibn al-Nasikh, Ibn al-Zayyat and al-Sakhawi describes graves of martyrs, *'ulama'*, and *awliya'* familiarizes the stranger with the intricacies of the great cemeteries, known today as al-Qarafa, of the capital city.[168] It does not embrace the local holy men who figured so largely as regional thaumaturges, whose names survive as place names (every 'Sheikh x' compound name), and whose tombs are contemporary cult destinations. An eye-witness description of 60,000 festal pilgrims heading for the Shamm al-Nasim[169] Muslim and Coptic celebrations at Sammalut in the 1930s conveys a more realistic picture of pilgrimage (compare Figure 71):

Figure 71 Pilgrimage scene at the *mawlid* of the Sheikh Bibawi at Biba, *c.*1920s

W Blackman, unpublished, Wellcome Library L0044819. Caption in WB's hand on reverse: 'This sheikh is claimed by both Muslims and Copts, and his mulid is held in the precincts and also in the church itself. An arm of the holy man only is preserved here - This scene is in the courtyard of the church'

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[168] Sources described in full in Taylor 1999, 229-234.
[169] Shamm al-Nasim, ('sniffing the breeze') is described in McPherson 1941, 5; Legrain 1945, 85; Keimer 1951; Atiya 1991, 2126.

... when a third-class coach can contain nearly a thousand souls, with three hundred more on the roof, and when - in spite of the shoving and the shouting and the blows given and received, and the presence of innumerable bundles of all sizes and shapes in the car as well - not one person is killed or suffocated, it is impossible not to be amazed a little at the hardiness and physical resistance of the people of Egypt....When the trains arrive, a thick river of human poverty and sweat pours into the town (Ayrout 1963, 104).

Several influential ethnographers in the early twentieth century realised the importance of studying and recording the world connected with the cult of saints, which they saw disappearing under the pressure of government and theological censorship, termed 'killjoy *Zeitgeist*' by McPherson (1941, 131). Blanchard set out a sixteen-point questionnaire which he urged individual researchers to use, in lieu of a proper commission undertaking the mass collection of data 'before it is too late', pleading that 'a detailed account of the cult of even one insignificant saint, it should be borne in mind, may prove of the highest permanent value to science' (1917, 191). Responses to this appeal came in the form of McPherson's personal and idiosyncratic *The Moulids of Egypt,* published in 1941, an invaluable resource but one which is neither systematic nor comprehensive, and Blackman's sadly unfinished and unpublished survey of *mawlid*s in Middle Egypt (Ikram 2000, viii). Nonetheless a large body of information lies in various travellers' accounts and in a number of accounts of individual cults (Reeves 1995; Mayeur 1991; de Jong 1976/77; Hornell 1938; Blackman 1923*a*, 1923*b*, 1924; Blanchard 1917) as well as in some recent synthetic discussions of Egyptian saints (Sengers 2003; Meinardus 2002; Taylor 1999; Hoffman 1995; Biegman 1990; Gilsenan 1973). The data from these accounts of *ziyara* in the modern period will be juxtaposed with the medieval literature expressing opposition to *ziyara,* which provides some evidence of the actual practices taking place, and related back to evidence for similar practices from the dynastic period. In the dynastic and Coptic period, much of the evidence occurs in contexts which are understood to express 'high knowledge', but by the medieval period these practices have slipped into the category of 'low knowledge', and are accordingly stigmatized.

Ibn 'Aqil, (d. 513/1119) (Baghdadi, lived in Damascus) for example, described 'objectionable rituals which include kindling lights, kissing tombs and covering them with perfume, addressing the dead with petitions, writing formulae on paper, taking earth from the tomb as a blessing, hanging rags on trees, etc... Such practices, he argues, were

tantamount to *djahili* practices' (*EI*, 525b; Makdisi 1997, 209). Ibn Taymiya, al-Turkmani and Ibn 'Abd al-Hadi commented on similar practices and denounced them (Ohtoshi 1993, 25).[170] The danger of *jahili* customs, specifically those closely linked with Egypt of the pharaonic period, resurfaced time and again, notably in Hasan al-Banna's (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood) anti-Pharaonist polemics of the 1930s: he described Pharaonism as 'the revival of pagan *jahili* customs which have been swept away, and the resurrection of extinct manners'; the aim of this "resurrection of the dead" was "to annihilate the characteristic traits of Islam and Arabism" (Wood 1998, 185, quoting from Gershoni 1982). There is thus an ongoing sensitivity in orthodox, elite Islam, to the enactment of pre-Islamic ritual, especially where it tends towards reanimating the dead.

Assuming for the moment that this is an accurate description of practices carried out at saints' tombs around the twelfth century AD, we may consider the validity of Ibn 'Aqil's claim that these practices were of pre-Islamic origin.

4.2.1.1 The use of lights at tombs

Contracts benefiting Djefahapy, the Middle Kingdom nomarch of Asyut, specify the burning of candles at his tomb on key festival dates as part of the observances of his personal mortuary cult (Spalinger 1998, 249). It is reasonable to assume that Djefahapy's contracts formalise and attempt to ensure the performance of a practice normally carried out by *family* members of the non-elite.

Burning tapers, candles, and wax lamps are frequently shown in visual representations of the deceased and family participating in either the funerary feast or continuing consumption of food in the afterlife (Davies 1924).[171] Given that these scenes probably represent an eternal or 'ur-scene' of eating, rather than 'recording' a single funerary banquet (yet to take place), it can be inferred that sometimes the meal was thought to

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[170] 'The authors of the pilgrimage books censured these actions severely, depending on al-Ghazali (d.1111)'s saying: "Do not wipe off the tomb, touch it or kiss it because these are Christian [?] habits"' (Ohtoshi 1993, 25).

[171] Davies points out that some lamps, especially the Ramesside pyramidal ones, may have been used for fumigation rather than illumination, or a combination of the two.

occur after dark and therefore candles and lamps were necessary.[172] Light in the necropolis was important for the dead as much for the living, as Chapter 137B of the Book of the Dead illustrates.

Lamps were used in the ancient world in a variety of ritual contexts, for example at festivals: Herodotus describes the famous "festival of lamps" (*lükhnokaiē*) celebrated at Sais and throughout Egypt (2.62.1-2), and during the Roman period lamps might be stamped with the image of particular deities, such as Isis of Pharos, to be lit in connection with her festival (Frankfurter 1998*b*, 54). Maqrizi's descriptions of the kindling of fires and lights at Nawruz have been linked with the traditional lamp festivals of dynastic Egypt (Salem 1937, 167).[173] Lychnomancy (divination with a lamp), a common practice in the Greek/Demotic magical papyri, and lamps associated with household devotions, indicate further ritual uses of light (Worrell 1916; Ray 1981; Gee 2002).

Above all, the vast quantity of lamps from the Roman period and late antiquity excavated from mortuary contexts, suggest that creating light played an important role in the care of and interactions with the dead. Shenoute upbraids pagan worship of 'demons' which involves 'burning lamps for empty things', though he does not specify the cemetery as the location.[174] Lamps with Coptic dedicatory inscriptions, such as Q 2228, found at Faras in Tomb 22 of cemetery 4, dated 500-650, show Christian use of lights in the cemetery (Bailey 1988, 107-108; Dunand 1976).

The link to the modern period exists in the anti-pilgrimage literature already described. In the twentieth century, Hornblower and Blackman noted that lanterns were lit and frequently hung on sheikhs tombs, as well as the tombless trees at Nezlet Batran (Hornblower 1930, 18; Blackman 1926*a*), while Blackman and Galâl observed that candles were the most common offering and were kept burning in the sheikhs' tombs,

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[172] Although Davies thought that 'the rite of setting the evening lamp for the use of the dead in his tomb does not seem to have been popularly practised except on rare festivals' (1924, 14), on the basis of two Ramesside texts specifying lighting lamps during the epagomenal days.
[173] Salem relies on the five epagomenal days being called 'lamp-days' in a demotic papyrus dated 148-7 BC.
[174] Shenoute, Discourses 4: *The Lord Thundered* (codex DU), ed. Amélineau 1909, 379.

sometimes every night, sometimes just on Fridays, and always on the nights of certain festivals (Blackman 1926*a*, 49; Galâl 1937, 200). The same use of lamps in cemeteries was also noted among twentieth-century Copts (Doresse 1960, 30).

4.2.1.2 Use of perfume

At dynastic funeral banquets, guests were perfumed with incense, but there is no direct evidence for perfuming *tombs* with incense. Statues of gods however were perfumed in temples. There is therefore very tenuous evidence for the medieval use of incense at tombs deriving from pharaonic practice. However, if we take the evidence of the sheikh who was reputed to burn perfume at the pyramid of Mycerinus and circumnambulate it at dawn and dusk as an indication of collective ideas of *appropriate* behaviour, perfuming ancient tombs was occurring in the nineteenth century (Grinsell 1947, 348, quoting Barges 1841, 16-17). There are also accounts of incense being offered specifically to the Sphinx documenting this practice in the 13th/14th centuries (Haarmann 1996, 621).

Incense figures in the Coptic cult of the dead, as recorded by Legrain in the first half of the twentieth century in Upper Egypt. The Rakh'ma ceremony falls between the category of pilgrimage and the *Tala'* (Section 4.2.2 below); it refers to a practice whereby relatives of the deceased gather at the monastery where s/he has been buried, three times a year. After a night at the monastery, and the distribution of bread, watermelons, grilled fish, sugar cane, and the favourite foods of the deceased to the poor in the name of the person who has died, the group go to the cemetery where a priest passes each tomb censing it, and the mourning women name those buried and burn grains of incense on their behalf (Legrain 1945, 119).[175]

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[175] Lane also describes the Coptic Rakh'ma ceremony on 'Id al-Mīlād (Festival of the Nativity, 29 Kiyahk), 'Id al-Ghiṭās (Baptism of Christ, 11 Toobeh), and 'Id al-Qiyāma (Resurrection, Easter), and notes 'They say that they visit the tombs merely for the sake of religious reflection. In doing so, they perpetuate an ancient custom, which they find difficult to relinquish; though they can give no good reason for observing it with such ceremonies' (1860, 547-8).

4.2.1.3 Petitioning the dead

Regarding the question of petitions to the dead or divine, there are a variety of ancient practices that may be considered. The so-called 'letters to the dead' (Gardiner and Sethe 1928)[176] are highly specific and personalized communications with dead relatives, probably accompanied by food offerings. The context in which they were made, that is whether as part of a formal or informal visitation, is unknown, but the deliberate composition of the texts and underlying conception of communicating with the dead suggests that there was a serious ritual aspect to these letters. Some were excavated from tombs, on the basis of which it has been assumed that they would have all come from a funerary context. We cannot know whether such letters were deposited at the time of burial or subsequent to it, but in the case of the Qau bowl (UC 16163) the writer took advantage of the death of another family member and 'posted' a letter to his deceased parents at the time of the later burial (Gardiner and Sethe 12). Their general significance can be easily overemphasized (there are only about twenty known, and they date between the Old and New Kingdoms – obviously one is tempted to ask why we do not have more), as may be the case in Abu Zahra's study (2002) of the relationship between Isis and the contemporary cult of al-Sayyida Zaynab.[177] Medieval pilgrimage guides stressed the ability of the dead to return proper salutations and talk with the living (Ohtoshi 1993, 25). In modern Egypt, people have been observed verbally addressing the dead, either during visits to the graves of their deceased relatives to discuss problems (Abu Zahra 2002, 216 n. 1), or at the shrines of Egyptian saints such as al-Sayyida Zaynab. Abu Zahra describes such communication as talking to the saint or relative as if they were not dead, which seems to underscore an Egyptian model of continually integrating the dead into daily life.

Petitions seeking vengeance from the gods, in some sense using the deceased as messenger, are commonly found in cemeteries, written in Demotic and Greek during the Graeco-Roman period (Ritner 1993, 181, and n. 841). In Islamic practice the intention of

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[176] References to further examples of Letters to the Dead are in Ritner 1993, 180 n. 834.

[177] 'In ancient Egypt, people wrote letters to the dead and deposited them at their temples (Pinch 1993, 356). Egyptians today write letters to the deceased members of the house of the Prophet including al-Sayyida, and to eminent Muslim scholars like imam al-Shafe'i and deposit them on their shrines' (Abu Zahra 2002, 221).

seeking vengeance via the deceased seems to have disappeared, yet possession stories suggest an acknowledgement that such practices are believed to take place. Malevolence in Islamic Egypt takes the form of the evil eye, and the misbehaviour of the *jinn* or *qarin/qarina* (Padwick 1923-5; Blackman 1926*b*; Griffiths 1938), rather than deliberately invoking the deceased.

Written formulae

Ibn 'Aqil's description of writing formulae on paper is problematic – it seems to counter the prevailing impression of restricted literacy in the middle ages, and the professionalization of all magical practice. In later periods the evidence suggests that *written* magic was the province of the specialist (Blackman 1927, 183; Lane 1860, 217); Ritner's view of written magic in dynastic Egypt parallels this idea but goes further in assigning the magician a specific status in the religious hierarchy: 'Combining in himself [sic] the role of composer, compiler, and performer, it is the priest alone who constitutes the "private" magician in ancient Egypt' (1993, 232).

4.2.1.4 The use of sand and earth

Bodily contact with the tomb was clearly an important way of connecting with the deceased saint. The medieval Cairo pilgrimage guides, by their repeated prohibitions, suggest that pilgrims touched, kissed, and rolled over the graves in order to rub their bodies directly on the graves (Ohtoshi 1993, 25, 28, and n. 24; Taylor 1999, 148). Furthermore, medieval pilgrims removed sand or dirt from the tombs to cure various physical complaints (Ohtoshi 25-6; Taylor 53, 73, 185), and this practice is attested in the following twentieth-century ethnographic sources, suggesting continuous transmission since the time-period described in the guides.

McPherson photographed and described pilgrims rolling on the ground at the graveside of the Nebi al-Lusha, at 'Abd al-Rahim's Qena *mawlid* in 1938 (1941, Figure 72 below), noting that women also rolled in the sand at the tomb of the 'Sultan Maghrouri' at the Bektashi Monastery every Friday (132). His description, an incidental aside from his main focus on the festival celebrations, gives rare documentation of this ceremony:

After a ceremony at the tent of Tashrifa, at which his Excellence was present, the zeffa and thousands of the crowd passed through the great necropolis and far into the desert, halting on the return, at the tomb of the Nebi el-Lusha, where a remarkable ceremony of rolling in the blessed sand, within the enclosure was enacted. It was highly reminiscent of the rolling women on Fridays at the tomb of the Sultan Maghrouri at the Baktashi monastery under the Moquattams.

(McPherson 1941, 132)

Figure 72 Pilgrims rolling on the ground at the graveside of the Nebi al-Lusha

From McPherson 1941, pl. opp. 133

In 1950s Silwa near Aswan, Ammar noted that a woman would journey to a far-away saint's tomb, taking food with her in a dish and returning with the dish filled with sand from the tomb; she would then sprinkle this sand over her own body as a fertility practice (1998 [1954], 88). Galâl recorded that women would take dust from a saint's tomb both as proof of their visit and a way of making sure the saint did not forget their visit, and also as a form of *baraka* (1937, 199). It seems reasonable to link this deployment of dirt, sand

and direct physical contact with the dust of the tomb with Islamic magical practices, in which earth from a pharaonic tomb was required in a number of Arabic magical prescriptions; alternative sources of dirt included ancient, deserted, Jewish, or Christian tombs (Fodor 1992, 181). The medieval *Kitab Masisun al-Rahib*, for example, required dust from Giza (a necropolis), Antinoe and a third place to produce a talisman conveying wisdom (Haarmann 1980, 61). A parallel to this may be found in the popular belief recorded by Naguib, of angels taking dust from three places at the moment of conception in order to form a person: from the place of birth, the place where a person will live, and the place where they will die (1993, 17). A metaphor for describing a death is to say 'his dust has called him' (17).

These uses of sand or earth from saints' tombs relate to the contagious quality of *baraka* and its material transmission, described by Douglas thus: 'Anything which has been in contact with *baraka* may get *baraka*' (1984, 113). Contemporary Coptic pilgrimage practices also show the need to make bodily contact with the saint's tomb – as Mayeur-Jaouen has noted, 'touching it is an essential part of the pilgrim's visit, for the objects that can bring the *baraka* must be touched as long as possible' (1997, 216). Two questions arise from these observations: firstly, does the practice of contact with sand or dirt from an Islamic saint's tomb have precedents in the use of sand or dirt from a saint's tomb in late antiquity, or even further back, a pharaonic tomb in the dynastic period; secondly, is there a difference in modern Egypt between the dirt obtained from a pharaonic tomb and that from a saint's tomb?

The ancient practice of gouging dust from stone figures and monuments has already been noted, (on page 186), but the evidence indicating the removal of sand, earth or dust from tombs is lacking. Some of the 'damage' to tombs could be re-examined in terms of similarities with the temple gouges and reinterpreted accordingly, although the dating of tomb damage is often problematic.

During the dynastic period, sand was used in a variety of purificatory contexts: as a foundation deposit, in temple precincts or for the blueprint House of Life at Abydos (see p. 71 above),[178] offered to the gods, strewn during their processions, and in various private magical rites (Ritner 1993, 155-6; Aufrère 1991, 665-7; Martin 1984, 378). Sometimes 'sand from the inundation' is specified,[179] but otherwise the provenance is not given, so in this period sand or dirt from the tombs presumably has not acquired a magical charge. It was however used as a constituent in medicine (Grapow 1954-73, VI, 481; VII, 2, 837). Lastly, a high content of sand has been found in many loaves of bread used for funerary offerings, possibly produced specially for funerals (Ikram 2003, 133), the sand being incorporated for its symbolic rather than culinary qualities.

The idea of sand transported from a significant location appears in the ritual of confirmation of royal power in the New Year, discussed by Goyon (1972). 'Bringing the earth from the castle of Benben,' in other words a sample of sand from the symbolic primordial mound in Heliopolis, conferred the protection of the companions of Atum on the king. The theme of protection is played out in the use of sand.

Evidence for the use of earth or sand from tombs occurs in a number of late Graeco-Egyptian spells, for example PGM IV, 435-6; the magical material must be held while reciting the prayer (Betz 1986; Borghouts 1978). The general principle operating here is similar to the idea that the dead possess *baraka*, and that this power can be transmitted to the living through the sand or soil they are buried in, or the leaves of trees growing over their bodies as discussed above. Dust or soil that has been in contact with living saints figures as a magical substance in a number of Christian saints' lives – the dust from the ground where Pisentius had trod cured headache, dropsy, deformed feet and muteness (Budge 1913, xlvii); the sand blessed by Petarpemotis promoted agricultural fertility

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[178] See Derchain 1965, 49 n. 4, 139, and 8* (col. 6/9-10). Compare also the substratum layer of sand at Djer's tomb, on page 137 above.

[179] "You sprinkle it (the chamber) with clean sand brought from the inundation" (Griffith and Thompson 1904, 76-77, col. 10/10). In the demotic story of Setna Khaemwas, Naneferkaptah fills the magic ship of Pharaoh with sand, and uses sand to separate the severed pieces of the eternal serpent he has killed.

(Canney 1926, 34), instances of Douglas' observation that dirt, which is normally destructive, sometimes becoming creative (1984, 160). The particular thread I would like to draw out is the taking of soil from the tomb as a ritual act during a pious visit.

4.2.1.5 Food sacrifice in the modern period at funerals

When Garstang was excavating the cemeteries at Beni Hasan, he drew attention to the parallel between animal sacrifice in the ancient Egyptian funerary context, and contemporary practices involving animal sacrifice at Islamic funerals; he described the custom being 'maintained' to the present day (1907, 106). Garstang speculated that with time '...the custom became shorn rather of its religious significance, especially as the greater part of the animal was handed over to the friends assembled around the graveside to feast upon at the end of their day's work' (106). He also recorded a more extraordinary parallel: 'except in cases of superstitious women who secretly perform the act, food is not buried with the dead' (106). Hornblower noted the post-funerary sacrifice of a sheep carried out in some parts of Upper Egypt in the 1930s, ostensibly to prevent the spirit of the deceased from entering the village, but argued that this was evidence of transmission of a rite *without* the understanding of its original purpose (1932, 47). While recognizing that 'this was doubtless a relic of the last banquet given to the deceased - and to his ancestors also, as we may see, for example, in the tomb of Paheri - by his sons to assure his safety and comfort in the Underworld' (47), Hornblower severs any valid connection with modern practices.

Firstly, animal sacrifice has taken place at or soon after the interment in Egypt, beside the grave, since *c*.2600 BC according to late Third-early Fourth Dynasty tomb reliefs of cattle slaughter (Ikram 1995, 41).[180] Secondly, actual and symbolic food was supplied for the dead throughout the dynastic period; this was largely reduced in the Graeco-Roman period to libations of water.[181] The so-called funerary meal, the *dbḥt-ḥtp,* is referred to in

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[180] There is also evidence for the avoidance of eating as part of the rituals of mourning (Frandsen 1999, 135).

[181] A M Blackman noted weekly libations of water were made for the dead in Lower Nubia in 1907 (1916, 32-3).

standard offering formulae following the list of a thousand of bread, beer, oxen etc, and in the Story of Sinuhe (Sin. 195) where he is promised:

'The dance of the Oblivious ones will be done at the mouth of your tomb-chamber,
And the offering invocation recited for you;
Sacrifices [*dbḥwt-ḥtpw*] will be made at the mouth of your offering-chapel'

The Tale of Sinuhe (trans. Parkinson 1997, 36)

Food buried with the deceased, whether in the form of 'victual mummies' or in elaborate painted and carved depictions, represented a marker of prestige because it was definitively removed from circulation. Gradually, the buried supplies diminished, but the practice of the consumption and distribution of food above ground was clearly stronger and has been maintained. There is a kind of continuum of food effectively shared by the living and the dead, from the 'funerary banquet' including slaughtered animals at the time of burial (such as Second Dynasty burial at Saqqara Tomb 3477, or Tutankhamen's burial: Emery 1962; Winlock 1941),[182] the burial of stone, wood and pottery boxes replicating the shape of the food they contained (Ikram 2003, 132-3), to regular deliveries of offerings to the cemetery, and the requests for food, drink and incense in the long tradition of appeals to the living. Some have seen this as an indication that the deceased 'still belonged to the world' (Donadoni 1997, 267), but at the very least it suggests that the deceased could or should be treated with consideration and care.[183]

In the Christian period, textual evidence from the fourth century suggests that feasting at the grave of both family tombs and in memory of the martyrs was taking place across the Mediterranean world, and that Christian orthodoxy disapproved of this practice on

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[182] The funerary banquet described by Emery (1962) was predominantly made up of cooked dishes; the funerary feast in the KV54 deposit, published by Winlock (1941), is more varied.
[183] 'Among the oldest and most explicitly significant offerings were those consisting of food...These offerings reveal that the deceased still belonged to the world. Alongside the original offerings in the tomb's underground storeroom, other offerings were left periodically to make up for the amount consumed by the deceased' (1997, 267). Donadoni notes that the dead asked for more than he believes they got, with reference to the frequency of festivals on they wished to be remembered, and perhaps fed: 'It is impossible that such continuous celebration actually took place' (275).

account of its pagan origins (Brown 1981, 26).[184] In terms of actual food burial, Christian burials at Kellis (*c*.3rd-4th century), where 450 out of *c*.3-4000 graves have been excavated, have produced minimal grave goods including broken pots placed above the body which may be associated with food offerings, together with sprays of rosemary and myrtle (Bowen 2003). The absence of data from Islamic mortuary sites (see p. 202 and n. 139) means that there is no archaeological information available for the burial of food offerings.

The *ziyara* commentaries however indicate that butchering of livestock was taking place in al-Qarafa; both Ibn Taymiya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziya express objections to it (Taylor 1999, 187 n. 61). Otherwise, there is a long silence in the sources until the sudden momentary glimpse of the practice of burying food with the dead given by Garstang in the 1907 (p. 246 above), and a number of twentieth century accounts of food sacrifice in cemeteries (eg Galâl 1937, 197-8; Riad 1954, 116-7; Naguib 1993, 20, 24-6).

> The attendant (the negîb) of the tomb receives a portion of the animal sacrificed, including the head, and the feasters consume the rest. The custom is not confined to special dates or religious festivals of the Mohammedan calendar: even a wedding is often deemed a fitting occasion for a sacrifice, but the tomb of some local shêkh is the proper place, that his good spirit may grant a blessing to those concerned. (Garstang 1907, 106-7).

As the above quotation shows, the practice of food sacrifice in post-medieval Egypt is woven through *ziyara*, the *Tala'*, and occasions marking stages in the human life-cycle.

Here we are seeing the *same* activity at a similar type of nearby sacred space – the tomb or cemetery - contrasting with the change in activity that Chaniotis has noted at two Cretan sanctuaries with a lengthy history of continuous use as sacred places (2005, 146-7). Change of use, from sacrificial rituals and banquets for the initiation of ephebes (at Simi Viannou), and of offering food items, to blood sacrifices and dedication of weapons (at the Idaean cave), show an attachment to place but a fluid, evolving practice of ritual.

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[184] Brown cites Ambrose at Milan, in the 380s and, in the 390s, Augustine in Hippo attempting to restrict certain funerary customs among their Christian congregations, including such feasts (1981, 26).

In Egypt however there is a powerful attachment to the practice of sharing food with the dead, and thus it is logical to move the locus of the offering or meal to where the particular dead you wish to interact with are buried.

Thus, outside the world of the temple, there were clearly a number of ancient practices intended to activate or mobilize the aid of either a deceased person or a divinity. These practices took place in the vicinity of the tomb, or at a variety of shrines.

Medieval and modern practices connected with pilgrimage to the graves of saints, and their relationship to more ancient practices, may be summarised as follows. In dynastic Egypt the ritual use of lights is documented at the site of the tomb, above all at the funerary feast, and at festivals from the time of Herodotus; from the medieval period it is suggested to take place at family tombs and saints' cult places. Petitioning the dead in writing is found in the ancient period, but the evidence suggests that later communications with the dead are largely verbal. Belief in the magical quality of earth or dust from the tomb is documented in the Graeco-Roman period, but becomes far more important in Christian and Islamic magical and healing rites. The use of incense to perfume tombs may be an Islamic innovation, and the kissing of tombs cannot be traced back before the medieval period. Lastly, the concept of feeding the dead, and consuming commemorative meals at their graves, would seem to be a particularly durable ritual that has been practiced in Egypt without any hiatus since the dynastic period.

Reviewing Taylor's book on the *ziyara*, Amitai questioned his use of Damascene critics in presenting evidence for Al-Qarafa cemetery in Cairo, and suggested that the corresponding criticism of Cairene practices did not exist. This was because in Cairo, it seems that it was a fact of life, and 'no scholar thought it necessary to challenge it, either in theory or practice' (Amitai 2000, 689). The alternative explanations, that the practices did not take place in Cairo, or that they were transmitted later from Syria, seem less plausible. The guides themselves, due to the cumulative, reflective nature of Arabic scholarship, reflect longer time-spans than just the reality of the social context in which each was written; Taylor situates them within Braudel's *longue durée* (1980), suggesting that '... the pilgrimage guides consist of ideas and understandings - a sort of cultural style

of belief - that were created over and shaped by many centuries of unrecorded intergenerational transmission of knowledge and practice' (1999, 6).

Some pilgrimages can be given a fresh infusion of popularity by an apparition, the defining feature of Turner and Turner's post-industrial Marian pilgrimages (1978, ch.6,); this occurred at Zeitun in 1967, where the Virgin Mary appeared in a series of visits before huge crowds (James 1992, 101). The two significant features of these events are that Zeitun is very close to Matariya, the well-established site of the Virgin's Tree as discussed above, and that they took place during a time of national anxiety and insecurity caused by the Six-Day War.

In mid-nineteenth century Cairo, Lane observed the local custom of visiting the tombs of relatives on the two great festivals, 'Id al-Kabir and 'Id al-Saghir / 'Id al-Fitr (Lane 1860, 479-87). He described the mass exodus of people to the cemeteries, carrying palm branches[185] or sweet basil to lay on the graves, and food to give to the poor who gathered in anticipation around the tombs. Prayers were read from the Qur'an. He noted particularly a gender difference in the performance of this visit; after the 'rites' had been performed, the men returned home, while the women extended their visit from early morning to the afternoon, some even staying overnight in specially erected tents in the cemetery. Of these women, he claimed 'these are not generally esteemed women of correct conduct', and furthermore 'Intrigues are said to be not uncommon with the females who spend the night in tents among the tombs' (480). Like Shenute condemning festival pilgrims who 'destroyed their flesh in the tombs' (p. 189 above), many nineteenth century and modern observers at sacred occasions express disapproval of what they deem inappropriate behaviour in the cemeteries, focussing on sexual licence but also on the swings, whirligigs, dancers and story-tellers which formed part of the occasion.[186]

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[185] The palm was closely associated with Anubis in the dynastic period, and often carried by other funerary deities (Malaise 1995).
[186] Compare Poole's description of behaviour at festivals, p. 189 n. 133 above.

Lane did not associate this mass visit to the cemeteries at the Great and Lesser Festivals with the weekly visit referred to as the *Tala'*, nor in his publication of 1860 was he concerned with manners and customs beyond the metropolis,[187] but it seems clear that he is describing the same ritual, in a more elaborate form. In rural Egypt, special visits to the cemetery on the day following the end of Ramadan were noted by Sayce: 'On that afternoon the natives of Upper Egypt visit the tombs of their fathers, taking bread, dates, and other food with them, some of which they place on a shelf below a small opening in the wall of the tomb, and spend the night eating and drinking among the graves' (1906, 197). I will now turn to the regular visiting of the dead with whom the living are personally connected: the *Tala'*.

4.2.2 The *Tala'*

Surprisingly, it is not until the early twentieth century that the evidence for (presumably unbroken) continuity of a central element of funerary practice was documented, in Blackman's accounts of the weekly visit to the tombs known as the *Tala'*.

The *Tala'* attracted the attention of several archaeologists working in view of Islamic and to a lesser extent Coptic cemeteries. Blackman (1921, 1927) and Petrie[188] noted and commented on the weekly visit, the offerings brought, conversations with the dead, displays of grief, and other customs. Sobhy, whose style detracts from his many valuable observations and whose message is unequivocally 'Everything has survived and not revived' (1938, 64), highlighted the colloquial Arabic term for this visit: 'Even the word "tal'a" is a literal translation for the Egyptian term for a visit to the cemeteries, [*prt-'3t*[189]] and so forth and etc.; for indeed proofs do not lack that Egypt and its inhabitants live

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[187] Lane's *Description of Egypt*, written during his first trip to Egypt in 1825-8 and partly revised during his stay at Thebes in 1835, included his observations of rural life in the Nile Valley. It remained unpublished until 2000.
[188] E.g. in a letter of 17 January 1899; in Drower 2004, 153.
[189] WB I , 531.

today as they have always lived from immemorial time' (Sobhy 1938, 66).[190] He may have come to this conclusion independently, given his strong interest in the ancient Egyptian, Coptic and Greek etymologies of common Arabic words (1930; 1950), or he may be following Blackman, who wrote about the *Tala'* in 1921 ('Some modern Egyptian graveside ceremonies'), and again in *The Fellahin of Upper Egypt* in 1927:

> One day a week ... the villagers pay a visit to the graves of their relations and friends. The ceremony is called *eṭ-Ṭala'* meaning the coming forth or the going up ... On the day of *'eṭ-Ṭala'* the souls of the dead are believed to return to their graves, and they expect their relatives to meet them there ... The care of the dead is a strongly marked feature of Egyptian life generally, for these ceremonies are performed largely for the benefit of the departed, to ensure them happiness in the life beyond.
>
> (Blackman 1927, 117).[191]

Naguib also discusses the *Tala'* stating that the term means "sortir", "monter", "apparaître" (1993, 26-7), and finds the origin of the term in *prt-ḫrw* (WB I, 529, the offering for the dead). Although none of these arguments are matters of strict etymology, the parallel of *pri* for *Tala'* is persuasive.

Weekly visits to the tombs continue to take place today, with relatives of the deceased spending the night over the second and third days of 'Id, for example among the tombs at Minya.[192]

In the preceding discussion of Christian Abydos (section 3.3 above) two intertwined phenomena have been noted: the presence of someone living at the tombs (first Egyptian funerary priest, *ḥm-kȝ*, then Christian ascetic) and the bringing of food to the tomb for this person and/or the dead with whom he is closely linked. In Islamic cemeteries, again there

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[190] Sobhy also had a Coptic nationalist agenda: '... the Copts of the present day, considered from the ethnological, philological and anthropological points of view, are not only the direct descendants of the ancient Egyptians, but are the actual representatives of the ancient civilisation' (1935, 57-58).

[191] Blackman was fully convinced of the ancient origins of the ceremony, and discussed a number of further precise correspondences, verbal and material, between the practices she observed, and the ancient evidence (1927, Chapter 18, 'Ancient Egyptian Analogies').

[192] Pers. comm. Ahmed el-Leithy via Salima Ikram.

are living and dead residents, in the form of administrative personnel of the graveyard – the *ghufara'*, more recently *turabiya* (el-Shohoumi 2002), and their spiritual counterparts – the deceased sheikh or family member. Both types of resident still need to be fed, but the food is nominally brought, as in dynastic Egypt, as an offering for the deceased. Galâl's extensive study of rural funerary practice in the 1930s found that the food brought to one's relatives was deliberately not consumed by the mourners on their weekly visit: 'Ce qui est destiné aux morts semblant détestable pour les vivants' (Galâl 1937, 198 n. 1).[193] Instead, it was given to the poor; this contrasts with the general view of who fed on ancient mortuary offerings (as expressed by Garstang, see p. 246 above), in which it is thought that the offerings were consumed by friends and relatives. Bread or a rustic cake, the "komag" or "kabbouri" was brought by poorer people, the well-off bringing cooked beef or mutton dishes, fruit, and better quality bread and cakes on the occasion of festivals (197). Galâl alone states that the number and quality of offerings was determined by socio-economic factors; typically between 21 and 31 for the poor, and approximately 51 for the wealthy. The centrality of the theme of the food offering led Blackman to speculate that this weekly practice was connected with the *prt-ḫrw*, and that the *Tala'* was connected with the *prt-ʿ3t* (1921, 211-12).[194]

The Coptic cult of the dead incorporates similar ritual visits to the cemetery, with slight variations in the dates on which these occurred. In Cairo in the mid-nineteenth century, Lane described Coptic families visiting the tombs and sacrificing a buffalo or a sheep on three nights of the year.

> They say that they visit the tombs merely for the sake of religious reflection. In doing so, they perpetuate an ancient custom, which they find difficult to relinquish; though they can give no good reason for observing it with such ceremonies (1860, 547-8).

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[193] Galâl's study concerned the funeral rites enacted at Sharqiyyah, Buhayrah, Asyut, Aswan, and Cairo, and also drew on observations of his own village, Sandanhûr.

[194] Compare ritual meals at gravesides that are part of many North African cultures' mortuary customs – for example the Maghribi 'supper of the grave','*ashat l-kbar*' (colloqu.) on the day after death, when the family of a deceased person sent a meal to the grave, intended in practice to be distributed to the poor (Brown 1991, 124).

Lane admitted that he had difficulty in obtaining information about Coptic practices, and relied on a single informant. Though reminiscent of Herodotus' careful signposting of hearsay ('They say..'), Lane's account fails to indicate whether the perpetuation of an ancient custom is his own assessment or the Copt's assessment of his own culture. Legrain recorded the same Coptic ceremony taking place three times a year, which he terms Rakh'ma, involving a visit to the convent near where the deceased was buried (1945, 115-121). The family stayed the night, gave food to the poor in memory of the deceased, including bread, grilled fish, sugar cane, and the deceased's favourite dishes (119). The following day, after Mass, the mourners went to the cemetery, where the women recited the names of the dead as they passed each tomb (119). Finally, Wissa Wassef refers to regular Coptic visits to the cemetery as the *Tala'*, and states that these took place on the evening of general feast days (1971, 185). His information came from the villages, unlike Lane who focussed on Cairo, and Legrain on the large town of Luxor; it shows the tendency towards an alignment of mortuary practices shared by Muslims and Copts in the villages, who even use the same term.

Relatives and mourners bring food offerings, recitations are performed, the dead are placed in a discrete relationship with the ancient tombs – nearby, but no longer inside them – yet the practice of a funerary cult has been maintained.[195] Two things seem to be happening here: transmission of the idea of perpetuating the memory of the deceased through commemorative ceremonies, while positioning the Islamic and Coptic dead close to, but apart from their predecessors. Griffiths' insight into Antony's attitude towards the ancient gods is useful to recall here: 'What emerges, then, is a rejection of the past, but an unconscious adherence to some aspects of it. Here we may adduce a psychological truism: when a person rejects something passionately, he may yet be much influenced by it unconsciously' (Griffiths 1985, 27). The ancient tomb is abandoned as a burial spot, but

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[195] Regarding location, Blackman notes that 'many of the cemeteries are situated in the lower desert, and this name [*et-Tala'*] may have been given because the people always speak of 'going up' to and 'descending' from the desert' (1927, 117); the ceremony that Blackman regularly witnessed took place at a cemetery 'in the lower desert, ... it runs parallel to an ancient burial site lying rather nearer the upper-desert slope' (117).

the idea of how people use it and behave at it has been carefully transferred to the new burial ground.

4.2.3 *Mawlid*s

However, if we are searching for cultural continuities, we will have to turn to the popular *mawlid* culture of the Egyptians. Here, earlier forms of revelry have been recast to adapt to Muslim hegemonic culture. But this is another festival story.

(Lutfi 1998, 282).

(August 20, 1866, off Boulak)

'I intend to write a paper on the various festivals and customs of Copts and Muslims; but I must wait to see Abu Seyfeyn, near Luxor, the great Christian Saint, where all go to be cured of possession - all mad people. The Viceroy wages steady war against all festivals and customs....It is only up country that the real thing remains.'

(Duff Gordon 1983, 296)[196]

*Mawlid*s, or saints' birthdays, have attracted considerable attention in the literature which is coloured by two important themes. Firstly, their imminent demise, and secondly, the question of whether they are survivals of pre-Islamic festivals.

Anxiety about the disappearance of popular traditional festivals can be found again and again in the literature. Sidawy, who wrote extensively about *mawlid*s in the 1920s, begins one of his articles with a valediction to traditional Egypt, its passing signified by the adoption of modern European dress, the difficulty of finding professional mourners for funerals, the increasing use of cars: 'Bref, tout cela veut se moderniser, tout veut être *up to date*. L'Orient se meurt ...' (1923-4, 279).[197] Holding out against the evils of modernism - and it is difficult to tell whether fragments of this passage are tongue in cheek – are the festivals or *mawlid*s which Sidawy then presents. Within the framework

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[196] Sadly, she did not have time to write anything about *mawlid*s before she died in 1869; her data, especially from Upper Egypt, and her particular approach would have been an invaluable counterbalance to Lane's roughly contemporary observations in Cairo.
[197] See also Sidawy 1917; Sidawy 1923.

of an orientalist, anti-modernist discourse, the *mawlid*s therefore carry a distinct cultural 'responsibility', which necessarily influences many observers' accounts.

In McPherson's monograph (1941), which remains the single most important source on *mawlid*s, he also saw them as an institution under threat. Writing twenty years later than Sidawy, McPherson's anti-modernist stance is even more pronounced:

> The Egyptians live in such a wealth of glorious antiquities, material and spiritual, that they barely realise their priceless worth, and are so open-handed and free that they give away obelisks, allow ugly modernisations, suffer old customs to lapse, without realising the irremediable loss of each sacrifice, and that a fragment of the *Glory of Egypt* has departed (1941, 133).

The 'Glory of Egypt' is undefined, but McPherson clearly wishes Egypt and its local festivals to be preserved partly for the foreigners' benefit:

> 'They ['the Westerners'] come here to escape the abominations they have brought on themselves and much of the world, and to bask for awhile in the soft beauty of Eastern peace' (1941, 7).[198]

His text blames both western modernism and a 'rage for repression' (1941, 10) for the fragile state of these public festivals, and suggests that the source of this repression is the religious leaders, with the police merely carrying out their wishes. The same issue of Muslim opposition is documented by Early through numerous newspaper articles of the 1970s written by religious scholars, in which they criticized *mawlid*s as 'noisy and superstitious events, elevating a mere person to the status of intermediary between believer and God' (Early 1993, 85).

Despite the pressures of modernization and imposition of religious orthodoxy, *mawlid*s have in fact survived into the present (Meinardus 2002; Hoffman 1995; Biegman 1990; Schielke 2004). Without a comprehensive survey of all *mawlid*s throughout Egypt updating that of McPherson, it is not possible to assess whether significant change and diminution of festivities has actually occurred in the last hundred years.

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[198] McPherson cites Loti's seminal work, La mort du Caire (1909, ch. 2 in *La mort de Philae*), and in a neat miniaturisation of the palimpsest, writes 'Yet I think the East mourns now "*La mort de Loti*" (1941, 8).

The second theme, of the pre-Islamic origin of *mawlid*s and the question of whether they form a bridge to the ancient world, has a direct bearing on the issue of the transmission of knowledge. Medieval sources date the appearance of the 'first' Egyptian *mawlid*s to the early thirteenth century, and as Taylor notes, this has been accepted by modern scholars, who have seen this date as 'yet another aspect of the Sunni restoration in Egypt after the demise of the Fatimids in 1171' (Taylor 1999, 65). Nevertheless, *mawlid*s are widely believed to be 'a continuation of Feasts held hundreds or even thousands of years before the Prophet, just as many Christian celebrations can be traced back centuries before Christ' (McPherson 1941, 3). This assertion requires refinement.

The case for a pre-Islamic origin of *mawlid*s has been made using the timing of the festivals. A number of them are calculated according to what Blanchard calls 'solar dates of the agricultural year' (1917, 186), rather than the Islamic calendar.[199] In some cases, the timing can be argued to link a Muslim *mawlid* to a Christian saint, such as the *mawlid* of Shuhda (al-Shuhda or Sayyid al-Shadid), held at Mazghuna, half way between Cairo and Wasta, which McPherson suggested was actually commemorating the feast of St George (300-301). The evidence of the timing of festivals is used by Youssef in a series of studies of Christian festivals, in which she argues for direct links with specific local pharaonic festivals (1990, 1992, 1999; cf Section 3.3.4 above). A problem with this methodology is that the timing of ancient festivals is extremely difficult to establish; Schott's compendium of religious festivals listed in temple calendars and other texts gives a picture of a shifting series of possible dates, some because they are based on a lunar cycle, and others changing their date over time (1950). Youssef thus relies on Graeco-Roman festival dates, and combines these with iconographic correspondences between Christian saint and local Egyptian deity to show that 'on a essayé de christianiser plusieurs fêtes, de donner à des dates trop marqués des festivités anciennes, une orientation chrétienne à défaut de déraciner profondément un culte et ses manifestations ancestrales' (1990, 152). Further work might show whether the examples found are

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[199] McPherson describes the fluctuating dates of most of the *mawlid*s based on the lunar calendar, which caused him to miss some of them (37-50); this fluctuation means that no firm argument about a concordance of dates between modern and ancient festivals can be made about these celebrations.

typical or anomalous, and whether they are indicative of a cluster of other practices, and clarify our understanding of why some festivals persisted and others did not.

Besides the limited number of examples given by Youssef, the correspondence of dates between modern and ancient festivals has been confined to festivals linked to dates of importance to the Coptic religion, first by Lane (1860, 488) and most recently by Lutfi in a study of the Mamluk period entitled 'Coptic festivals of the Nile: aberrations of the past?' (1998). The Coptic festivals are proposed to incorporate older festivals connected with the rise and fall of the Nile, yet four out of five have become obsolete today, the *Wafa'* (when the river reached 16 cubits in Masra/August) now only 'a folkloric event appropriated by the Egyptian cultural bureaucracy to evoke popular nostalgia for an exotic past' (Lutfi 1998, 282). *Mawlid*s which separate themselves from following the lunar calendar and instead follow the solar calendar included those of Abu Harira at Giza (coinciding with Shamm al-Nasim), Sayyid al-Badawi at Tanta, Bayyumi in Cairo, Ismail Imbabi at Imbabi (linked by McPherson to the Isis festival of the 'Night of the Drop'), Ibrahim al-Dasuqi near Giza, and Marzuk in Cairo.

Distinctive features which cannot be attributed to Islamic belief have also suggested continuity from dynastic Egypt. The classic example is the use of boats in the *mawlid*s of 'Abd al-Rahim at Qena and Abu al-Hajjaj at Luxor. Hornell described the latter in 1938:

> This gorgeous festival has dwindled away lamentably. Its character has changed completely. Its elaborate ceremonial has been annexed and degraded into a ragged procession through the streets of Luxor in honour of an obscure Muhammadan saint, Sheykh (Sidi) Yusef Abu'l Haggag, about whom so many contradictory legends have gathered that the only fact certain is the presence of his tomb in a mosque within the walls of Luxor temple (1938, 145).[200]

Abu al-Hajjaj's festival is conventionally linked with the Opet festival (Bleeker 1967), depicted in monumental contexts such as Luxor Temple (Epigraphic Survey 1994). The

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[200] Compare Duff Gordon's description of Abu al-Hajjaj's *mawlid* in 1864: 'It all seemed to have walked out of the royal tombs, only dusty and shabby instead of gorgeous. These festivals of the dead are such as Herodotus alludes to as held in honour of 'Him whose name he dares not mention - Him who sleeps in Philae,' only the name is changed and the mummy is absent' (1983, 106-7). In a rare instance of inaccuracy, she seems to subsume the cult of Amon under that of Osiris.

emphasis on this type of ceremonial evidence available for the Opet festival has conditioned its presentation as an event of 'cosmic significance' (Bell 1997, 157), contrasting with the 'ragged procession' that disappointed Hornell. One example of evidence overlooked in the presentation of 'degradation' of the festival is an epithet of Amun suggesting the cosmic significance of the boat festival was not its most appealing feature: 'Amun of Opet-who-answers-the-poor' (Brand 2004, 261, fig. 3). The exposure of the boat shrine of Abu al-Hajjaj in the streets of Luxor to the general populace may draw more directly on the oracle processions of the Opet Festival or *Talfest* (Beautiful Festival of the Valley)[201] than has been previously emphasized. As Spalinger has observed, apart from the records of oracles taking place at festivals, 'we know very little about the festival practice of the private Egyptian' (2001, 524).[202]

This correlation raises a number of questions – given that festivals incorporating boats are depicted in a number of temples throughout Egypt, often with associated barque shrines, why should the boat procession be retained in so few locations and on so few occasions? Is the limited distance of the procession at the *mawlid* of Abu al-Hajjaj through the streets of Luxor (see Legrain 1914; A M Blackman 1923; Wickett 1990) compared with the Opet festival route (Figure 73), a result of simplification - the cutting out of the gods crossing the water as a superfluous episode – or logistics? Furthermore, how can the many practices at the modern *mawlid* that appear to be undocumented in the pre-Islamic period be accounted for? Fighting with quarterstaffs, circumcision, Qara Göz (Punch and Judy[203]), the sale of lottery tickets, conjurers, snake-charmers, poets and healers are all reported at *mawlid*s, as well as a strong Sufi element represented by the *dhikr* recitation and dancing.

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[201] Extensive bibliography of the *Talfest* is found in Bell 1997, 286 n. 38.
[202] Elsewhere Spalinger argues that careful distinctions should be made between the purpose of various public festivals, e.g. 'In contrast to Assmann, I do not see this great procession feast [the Opet] as one in which a large number of people actively involved themselves in some way that can be described as religious' (1998, 245).
[203] McPherson notes that Punch and Judy have been identified as Pontius Pilate and Judas Iscariot (1941, 81).

Figure 73 The Opet festival land and river routes

From Bell 1997, fig. 65; drawing by Carol Meyer

In the case of the festival of Abu al-Hajjaj (fl. AD late 12th- early 13th c.), some tentative interpretations may be offered. Firstly, the mosque of the saint is physically anchored within the temple of Luxor itself,[204] creating a constant spatial link between present and past. The boats for the *mawlid* are kept in the precincts of the temple (in Hornell's day, 'one rests on a rubbish heap, level with the top of the encircling wall; the other lies in a dark corridor outside the tomb-chamber'; 1938, 146), as they probably were in antiquity. Secondly, the story of Abu al-Hajjaj suggests the stitching together of pre-Islamic and Islamic elements. Abu al-Hajjaj is married to the Bint al-Kaysar, identified with the Christian martyr, St Dalacina (Meinardus 1965, 91). The boat in the festival of Abu al-Hajjaj represents a reference to a miraculous incident in his life, which hints at a familiar narrative tradition. The saint was sent for by the king of Egypt, and made the journey from Qena to Cairo with three other sheikhs in less than two days, 'or "in the twinkling of an eye"', in a stone boat (Grinsell 1947, 353). The topoi of magical journeys and being sent for by the king occur throughout the demotic *Setna* cycle of stories, and further back in the Middle Kingdom stories in *P. Westcar* (see also Section 2.2.6 above); if the story of Abu al-Hajjaj nods to the miraculous night journey of the Prophet, it is recast in an archetypally Egyptian narrative idiom. This, together with the boat made of stone whose very implausibility points to another element of narrative patchwork – perhaps a literal interpretation of the stone boats of the temple reliefs – is roughly joined up with a story element from Arabic literary tradition. This element is in fact a direct borrowing from a story about Sultan Hasan: briefly, Abu al-Hajjaj was so anxious that no mosque should be built superior to his own at Luxor, he caused the arm of his architect to be removed (Grinsell 1947, 352; Legrain 1914, 80).

In summary, the repetition of the boat procession, the placement of the mosque inside the temple, and the patchwork of dynastic, Christian and Islamic themes in the story of the saint form an organic whole, in which an actively palimpsestual approach to the past is at work. Abu al-Hajjaj embodies in an observable way the kind of charisma that it is

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[204] The biography of the temple includes a Roman camp, active during the fourth and first half of the fifth century (El-Saghir et al 1986), and a Christian church whose foundations are beneath the mosque (Kákosy 1991).

assumed Moses had until the decline of his pilgrimage at Abydos (see p. 187 above), but the data from Luxor, fuller and more recent, shows a large number of the Muslim community tracing their ancestry back to the saint (Legrain 1945, 31).[205] The charismatic figure of the saint is at the centre of a social web. Abu al-Hajjaj and Pachomius, respective patrons of the Muslim and Coptic communities in the Luxor area, though superficially in competition, share and support each other's charisma, as articulated through considerable cross-over in their veneration (Legrain 1945, 81; Mayeur-Jouen 1997).[206] Far from Islam destroying what came before it (Lutfi 1998, 256), to paraphrase Maqrizi's story of 'Amr ibn al-'As banning virgin sacrifice for the Nile festival, in the case of some *mawlid*s it preserved, edited and recast older material.[207]

A *mawlid* taking the form of a ritual visit to a sheikh's tomb was observed by Sayce at Helwan in the late nineteenth century. The celebration of the sheikh's festival involved a procession to hilltop on which the saint was buried, the release of a number of sheep and consequent sacrifice and consumption of some of them. Sayce believed that Abu Sirya had succeeded a local deity who was probably a form of Ptah, and that his festival had taken the place of that of the ancient god (1900, 393). This kind of small, local festival (compare Figure 74 below) shows the close affinities of *ziyara*, *Tala'*, and *mawlid*, and the ready superimposition of Islamic sheikh on ancient tomb site. It reinforces the role and importance of place, once again.

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[205] 'Tous les vieux musulmans d'origine thébaine sont plus ou moins parents d'Abou el Haggag; tous les Coptes véritablement authochtones sont de la famille des Siars (ou orfèvres)' (Legrain 1945, 31). Legrain was the only observer to record this information, which nuances the frequent claim that only the relatives of the saint are allowed to carry the boats in the procession.

[206] Mayeur-Jaouen (1997) suggests that the crossover is one-way, Muslims readily participating in Coptic *mawlid*s, but Copts eschewing the *mawlid*s of Muslim saints 'thanks to a minority reflex which is easy to understand' (218). This contention is not shared by earlier authors (e.g. Leeder 1918, 136; Blackman 1924).

[207] Butcher (n.d. *c.* 1910) notes that Maqrizi's account misrepresents the facts: the 'Bride of the Nile' was a Christian version of a pharaonic ceremony, the Christians lowering the mummified hand of a virgin martyr into the rising Nile, but 'Makrizi imagined that the accounts given to him of the earlier form of the festival referred to the sacrifice of a living virgin' (103; see also Bonneau 1964, 401-404). The legend then slipped into western mythology through Ebers' popular novel, *The Bride of the Nile* (*Die Nilbraut*, 1887). The way in which fiction mediates between reality and reception will be explored in more detail in the following section.

Figure 74 *Mawlid* of Sheikh 'Abd al-Qurna, West Bank, *c*.2006; procession going up to the shrine

From van der Spek 2007, fig. 11.4

4.3 Attitudes towards the ancient tombs

After the Arab conquest, archaeological and historical data about the use of ancient tombs is more uneven. In the medieval period, effigies of Muhammad were allegedly found in ancient tombs and interpreted as foretelling the coming of Islam (Haarmann 1996, 608), perhaps part of an effort to integrate pharaonic and Muslim history and to protect the monumental record from iconoclasm. Regular re-entry and spoliation occurred, as well as the use of the tomb as a place of refuge. I would like to explore attitudes towards the tombs in order to understand how and why re-entry occurred.

4.3.1 Indigenous attitudes towards the ancient tombs: the dangerous dead

'...it waits upon ghosts and skulks around dead bodies...'

(Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* 3.16. trans. Morgan 1989, 421: see p. 15 above)

Euphemisms ('The Place of Truth' for the west bank necropolis) and legends (the pyramids as Joseph's granaries) aside, it is not possible that the Egyptians have ever forgotten that the dead are buried in the tombs. It is often considered axiomatic that the dead are dangerous (Gardiner 1935; Posener 1958), but Egyptian religious thought provides a deeply prismatic view of the body, elements of the personality and soul, and the deceased's ability to interact with the world of the dead and the living. This interaction was presented as routinely benevolent in funerary texts; the dead had other challenges to face in the afterlife without acting aggressively towards the living, who ensured harmonious relations through proper behaviour in the form of a flow of prayers and offerings. The *3ḫ* ('spirit', with various positive variants and derivations, WB I, 13-16) can occasionally be glimpsed in the sources as a dangerous entity.[208] Posener (1981) has identified a number of parallels between the ancient Egyptian *3ḫw* and the modern *'ifrit*s, drawing on several folklorists' accounts of beliefs concerning these spirits in

[208] Compare Englund 1978, a study of the *3ḫ* in funerary texts.

Upper Egypt.[209] The *3ḫ* can be the spirit of a deceased relative, lingering around the tomb and often requiring appeasement, as in the *Instruction of Ani*:

Apaise l'esprit, fais ce qu'il aime,
Abstiens-toi de ce qui lui répugne,
Que tu sois préservé de ses nombreux méfaits,
Car tout ravage vient de lui.
Bête emmenée du champ?
C'est lui qui a fait pareille chose.
Dégâts sur l'aire aux champs?
"C'est l'esprit", dit-on encore.
Tempête dans la maison? Coeurs désunis (? découragés ?)?
Tout cela est de son fait.

(trans. Posener 1981, 394-5)

Posener takes the view that in this text, examples of the threatening behaviour of the *3ḫw* derive from rural life ('on voit dans quel milieu ces croyances étaient plus spécialement répandues'; 1981, 396), with the implication that the elite did not share this view of the spirits. Lichtheim classifies *Ani* as literature of the 'middle class', 'meant for the average man' (1976, 135) which suggests that this characterization of the spirit of the dead was part of middle class as well as peasant belief – that there was a continuum of belief. If however the *Instruction of Ani* is seen as a product of elite written culture, it may instead be read as an attempt to define a moral code for Everyman, including due respect for the power of the unsatisfied *3ḫw* who can make an animal disappear from the fields. But beyond the category of literary texts, the dangerous dead are in fact present in a variety of other contexts – in particular, threatening the living if they do not carry out their proper duties; for example, at the temple of Tuthmosis III at Deir el-Bahari, a Nineteenth Dynasty graffito reads:

As for anyone who shall read these writings and does not say to the gods, the Lord of the Sanctuary – "Blessings" – [for] what they have done: Osiris, the Lord of Eternity, the King of the Two Lands, shall pursue him with swellings in a latter day. Hathor, Mistress of the Necropolis

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[209] The description of the ghost who speaks to the king in a Third Intermediate Period story is too fragmentary to make out how the human characters feel about it (*P Chassinat* II Frag. A+B.x+7-x+8); Posener 1960; translation in Parkinson 1997, 289.

shall pursue his wives, while Imz-grt [sic[210]], *the Mistress of the West shall pursue his children when my face and eye are shrouded.*

(Morschauser 1991, 195).

Punishment is usually to be carried out by the gods in this type of curse, but transgressions are very much controlled, observed and initiated by the actively engaged deceased individual, whose imperious voice tries to exert continuing social controls into an indefinite future (compare the Letters to the Dead, p. 241 above]. This is demonstrated in an amuletic text from Deir el-Medina (Deir el-Medina 37), dating to the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, which appears to be made for protection against the dead (Koenig 1979). Fear of the enemy who has escaped from his tomb appears in other papyri from Deir el-Medina (Černý 1978, 8; *P Del-M* I, vo 3.3-4.4).

Figure 75 The Louvre ostracon with the story of Khonsuemheb and the ghost

N 667 and N 700 joined; terracotta; H: 19 cm, W 27 cm; provenance unknown. From Andreu, Rutschowscaya and Ziegler 1997, fig. 75

[210] Kitchen corrects to Me(rt)seger; RITA IV, 2003, 274.

The dead could also be responsible for cases of possession (Sauneron 1960). In the well-known ghost story from Deir el-Medina, the spirit of a deceased overseer of the Treasury meets the high priest Khonsuemheb in the necropolis and complains vigorously about his dilapidated tomb (von Beckerath 1992). Offered a new and superior burial, the spirit responds ambiguously:

'What is the point of the things you will do? Does not a tree grow in sunlight? And does it not produce branches? Stone does not grow as it ages; it crumbles to [...]'

(trans. McDowell 1999, 151)

The story suggests the appropriate response is one of sympathy towards the (perhaps slightly comic) ghost; the High Priest takes action and organises the restoration or rebuilding of the tomb, thinly masking fear and anxiety about spirits in the necropolis;

Amuletic decrees from Dynasty 22-23 also testify to fears of potential harm caused by the dead (Borghouts 1994, 126).

The dominant formulation of the experience of death in ancient Egypt is of an idyllic, calm afterlife, though the anxieties shown for example by some of the Coffin Texts have suggested a lack of complete confidence in this. Whatever its *Sitz im Leben*, the idea of a potentially malevolent presence in the necropolis is present in ancient Egypt. In the early Roman period, this malevolence appears to reach its apogee when Christian ascetics took over the tomb spaces and engaged in violent struggles with the 'demons' who inhabit them.[211] The struggle with the spirits of the dead was transformed into a benchmark of the saint's power, as seen in the stories of Antony and Moses (see pp. 134, 171, 178 above). Furthermore, this anxiety felt by the living in the necropolis is congruent with Freud's categorization of the *unheimliche*, the uncanny, being that which ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light. Such anxiety is reproduced by the modern

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[211] The sphere of action of 'demons' was obviously larger than just the ancient tombs (see for example Brown 1970), but I am suggesting that in the particular conflict experienced by anchorites, the demons are closely allied to the 'spirits' present in the tomb.

audience observing archaeologists at work with the ancient dead, as Moshenska has recently discussed (2006).

The dangerous dead are detectable in modern Egypt, often in the form of the *jinn* and the *'ifrit*s (Lane 1860, 226; Grinsell 1947).[212] Like the *3ḫw*, the *'ifrit*s are frequently troublemakers. Blackman's account of the elements of the person (*qarin* and *qarina*, *ruh*, *'ifrit*, *jinn*) presented a more complicated picture of the identity of the spirits thought to haunt the tombs (1927). The *'ifrit*s described to her were fire demons who live underground; they were threatening presences associated with springs, wells, and lonely paths through the cultivation.[213] The souls of the dead were thought to reside in the small green birds, thus she made the more obvious link with the ancient Egyptian *ba* rather than the *akh*. Other accounts describe the *'ifrit*s as the spirits of the dead which reside in the cemetery:

> The *fallāḥīn*, affected by Muslim beliefs, believe that in the tomb, or what they call *'ālam al-qabr*, the world of the tomb, which refers to any place where the corpse is buried, there is a life that differs in quality from this worldly life. In the tomb, dead people or their souls can see their places either in paradise or in hell. In other words, the tomb is equivalent to death as far as it is thought of as a transitional place or stage in which the dead people's souls wait without being confined to the tomb itself until the moment of resurrection or the collective incorporation of all souls and bodies (el-Aswad 1987, 234).[214]

The fearsomeness of the dead can, however, be used constructively by the living, for example in fertility practices. The practise of deliberately seeking out a violent fright as a means of achieving pregnancy is well documented (Blackman 1927, 102; Inhorn 1994; El-Aswad 1987, 236; van der Spek 2007, 185). This may be carried out in a number of

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[212] 'The belief that the pyramids of Giza and elsewhere were built by the Djinn, or are inhabited by them, has long been current among the Arabs. E.W. Lane wrote that he had been unable to persuade one of his Arab servants to enter the Great Pyramid because he held this idea that it harboured the Djinn' (Grinsell 1947, 348-9; see Lane 1860, Chapter 10).

[213] In the city, the *'ifrit* also showed a preference for water, as Poole's story of problems with a rented house show: "'It is a matter of no importance, O Effendee, but the subject which perplexes us is that there is a devil in the bath." My brother being aware of their superstitious prejudices, replied, "Well, is there a bath in the world that you do not believe to be a resort of evil spirits, according to the well-known tradition on that subject?"' (2003, 37). The Pooles did accept that the house was genuinely haunted and eventually moved out.

[214] The fieldwork on which El-Aswad's study (1987) is based was carried out from 1979 to 1980, in an Egyptian village in Beheira governorate, western Delta.

ways, but one of the most common methods is to go to a cemetery. Women are reported to visit both modern and ancient cemeteries for this purpose: at a tomb on the 'Asasīf, it can be arranged for the guard to confront a woman with a mummified torso (van der Spek 185). A gender difference may operate, as Keimer has suggested that Egyptians (by which he appears to mean male Egyptians) do not fear the tombs but will not spend the night in the desert (1944, 144; cf Sattin 2001, 60). But in extremis, in particular during periods of forced conscription during the nineteenth century, tombs could be used once again as places to hide:

> ...the majority of the fellaheen who had sons of the prescribed age, fled with them quietly to the mountains, or concealed themselves in the inmost recesses of the larger tombs, arranging that their wives or other relatives should bring them food and water by night.
>
> (Rhind 1862, 315).

Blackman observed and participated in fertility rituals in which women stepped in and out of ancient tomb entrances, and over the bones and skulls of their occupants (1922, 155). Even in the city, material from the tombs served useful purposes: a midwife in mid-nineteenth century Cairo owned a ragged bundle of ancient statues and ushabtis which she hired out to women in labour, and would not sell (Mackenzie 1865).

The ritual of the shabshaba of Za'zū', designed to protect against infidelity, begins with the woman visiting an ancient tomb on a Friday, and walking backwards into it (Fodor 1992). Documented in late nineteenth century rural Egypt, Fodor interpreted the practice through its similarities to spells from the Greek magical papyri and elements of the mythology of Isis and Horus. He showed that the ritual encompasses a number of elements that derive from ancient practice – the use of a familiar spirit (descended from the *paredros*), the treatment of the brick-baby reflecting elements of the Isis myths, and the closing words of the incantation quoting Greek formulae. Consciousness of the relationship with pre-Islamic Egypt is demonstrated by the woman beginning the ritual by visiting an ancient tomb. Islamic Egypt is populated with the presence of powerful non-Islamic spirits, that tend to live in places which are most clearly associated with the ancient Egyptians – tombs, temples, and the desert (Blackman 1927, 227; Haarmann 1996, 610). Although potentially hostile, their powers were enlisted for apotropaic

purposes, and the act of engaging their help was achieved through remembered fragments of correct protocol.

A range of different attitudes towards the tombs therefore operates in Islamic Egypt, but the important theme is the recognition of those who are buried there. This takes the form of adapting the range of 'folk' beliefs in non-material beings to fit the perceived spiritual presences in the ancient necropolis. Van der Spek's recent and extremely valuable work on the Qurna community (2004, 2007) distances itself from a reading of the present in terms of specific continuities from the past, preferring to take a phenomenological perspective and stress the role of and response to the 'landscape', which embodies social connections and continuities (2007, 177). Yet the mapping of conceptions of powerful spirits between folk Islam and past history of the ancient necropolis suggests an adaptive use of religion, as well as of the monuments themselves.

4.3.2 Western archaeologists vs 'tomb robbers'

'What the pyramid hid is empty'

The Admonitions of Ipuwer, trans. Lichtheim 1975, 156

Howard Carter writes about the cliff tomb prepared for Hatshepsut, which he discovered in 1916-7, 'When I wrested it from the plundering Arabs I found that they had burrowed into it like rabbits, as far as the sepulchral hall' (Carter 1917, 118). 'Plundering Arabs' are prevalent in the literature from the early days of European exploration of tombs. The superficial reading of the reasons both Egyptians and Europeans were drawn to the necropolis is typified by Nestor l'Hôte's comments on Saqqara:

> Depuis plus de mille ans ces catacombes sont exploités par la soif de l'or; aujourd'hui la curiosité se joint à l'avarice pour exprimer sans cesse de cette mine un genre de richesse qu'elle produit toujours et qui semble ne devoir jamais s'épuiser (Harlé and Lefebvre 1993, 84).

I would like to argue that because tomb robbery is a socially constructed category, in any period, it masks other reasons for entering tombs, removing objects and materials, and

engaging with the past in a meaningful way. Following on from this, the reoccupation of tombs by western archaeologists will be explored.

During the Ramesside period, the robbery of elite tombs is frequently characterized as an 'industry'. The 'thieves' (*it3yw*, as the filing docket on *P. BM* 10054 describes them) were a socially diverse group: they included scribes, merchants, boatmen, temple watchmen, and the slaves of important figures (Donadoni 1997, 27; see also Peet 1930, 84-5).[215] In these texts, entry into the tomb, interference with the bodies, and removal of grave goods, is characterized as a crime, but the nature of the sources means that they represent only the official reaction, following investigation of the necropolis which was driven by concern for the royal burials. It is true that *P. Abbott* (BM 10021) mentions robbery of the tombs of the chantresses, and 'the tombs and chambers in which rest the blessed ones of old, the citizenesses and citizens on the West of Thebes' (Peet 1930, 39):

'It was found that the thieves had violated them all, dragging their owners from their inner coffins and their outer coffins so that they were left on the desert, and stealing their funerary outfit which had been given to them together with the gold and the silver and the fittings which were in their inner coffins' (trans. Peet 39).

In this case, the citizenesses (*ʿnḫ nw niwt*) and citizens (*rmṯ n p3 t3*) have rich funerary goods, suggesting that these were not the tombs of ordinary people.

Across the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, the tomb presented as *domus aeterna*, yet there is an extensive literature of curses directed at those who continued to ignore this construction (Parrot 1939; Gager 1992). Despite protective 'curse' formulae at Egyptian tombs, and the series of investigations detailed in the tomb robbery papyri, the fact remains that tombs were reentered and their goods often removed on a continual basis. Typically, this is described in the literature as a problem: '... the problem of tomb violation was endemic throughout the history of ancient Egypt' (Morschauser 1991, 145). The curse formulae in fact appear to *assume* that the tomb will be entered; their concern is rather for the state of ritual purity of the one who enters:

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[215] For tomb robbery in ancient Egypt in general, see Allen 1932; for some new interpretations of the dating and official responsibility for New Kingdom tomb robberies, see Jansen-Winkeln 1995.

[As for any man who shall enter this tomb] (if) he has not been purified [as he ought to be purified on behalf of an excellent *3ḫw*]: [I shall seize his neck like a bird's..]

(Inscription in the tomb of Kagemni, Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty: Urk. I, 195, 15-17; trans. Morschauser 153)

Seen from this perspective, the series of injunctions in tombs against entry, removal of offerings, or building materials, read as token objections and attempts to control a recognized practice. The sheer number of examples of these injunctions demonstrate the perception of tomb entry and 'robbery' as a social evil, by those who commissioned the tombs and their inscriptions, in the face of persistent repetition of such acts by everyone else.

All the above suggest that entering a tomb and removing objects from it was negatively perceived by some of the population, proving that the concept of robbery did exist. However, tomb robbery is enmeshed with parallel practices of entering tombs and removing objects for a number of positive reasons – curating, memory, respect, connection, etc. in dynastic Egypt (eg Jeffreys 2003*a*).

In the Coptic period, there is no evidence of 'robbery' of dynastic burials comparable with the dynastic tomb robbery papyri or use of curse formulae, although there is widespread reuse of the tombs themselves, as discussed in section 3.3.1 (Reoccupation of tombs, living with the dead, above), and the evidence of a variety of reused objects from tomb contexts, such as the offering table reused as a support for water jars (Figure 76 below). Its hieroglyphic inscription 'Montu, Lord of Thebes' suggests that it was found in a tomb or offering chapel on the west bank and then reused at one of the local monasteries.

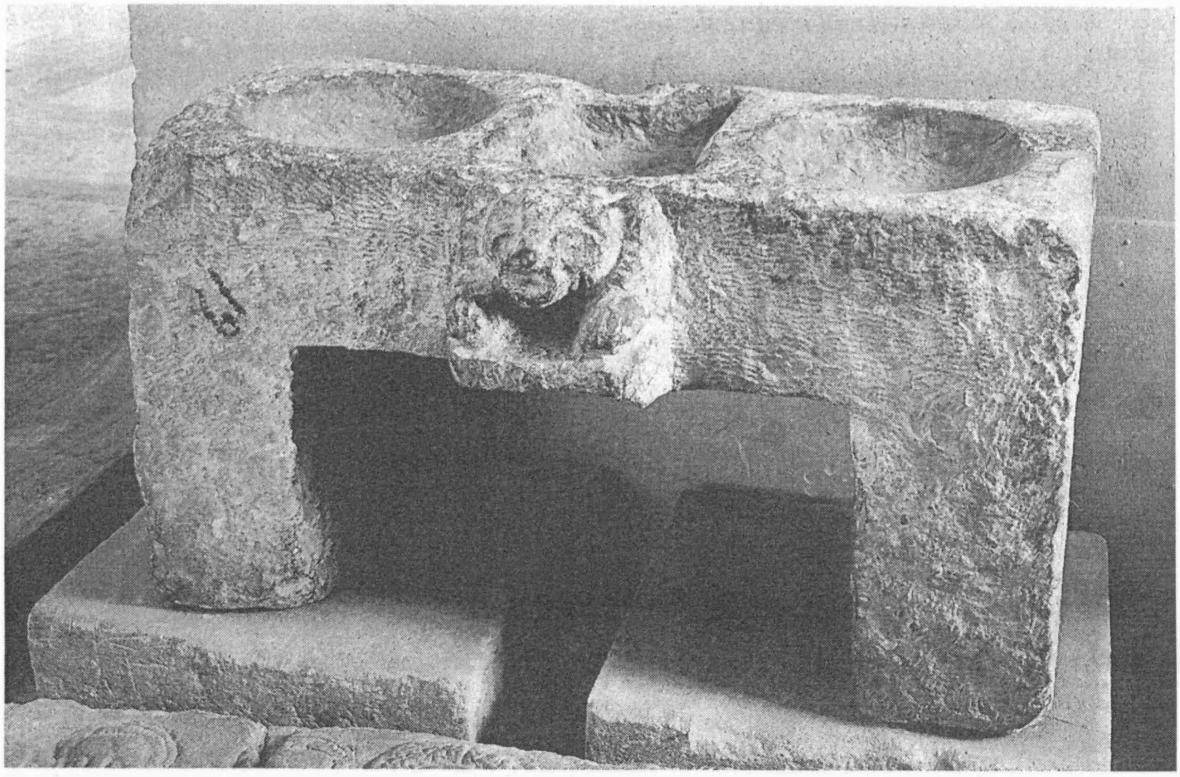

Figure 76 Offering table adapted for use to support water jars; from Thebes

Louvre AF 12410. From Bosson and Aufrère 1999, cat. entry 25, 194

There is however evidence of robbery of the Christian dead, in the story of Apa Claudius and the thieves, from an encomium delivered on his anniversary *c.* AD 600 (Drescher 1942). Brown describes the audacious criminals:

> Around A.D. 600, a gang of burglars operating in Upper Egypt could make a start at the place of Apa Collouthos, outside Antinöe, go south a few miles to Saint Victor the General, cross the Nile of Apa Timothy, and head downstream again at nightfall to the Place of Apa Claudius, reaping a swag of silver altar tablets, silk and linen hangings, even the silver necklaces and the crosses from around the necks of the mummified saints (1981, 11-12).

This robbery, carried out by 'pagans', can be contrasted with a number of instances of Christian theft from pagan temples. Shenute, for example, went to court for plundering shrines and destroying images at Plewit (Frankfurter 1998*b*, 69; 281), but the nature of the source implies that he was justified. The fifth-century Coptic story of Theophilus and the Three Thetas, from a sermon attributed to Cyril of Alexandria (Vis 1929, 121-204), provides another perspective on Christian presentation of legitimate plunder. Theophilus,

archbishop of Alexandria, and his disciple Cyril, stumble on a pagan temple decorated with fantastic images and writings; they interpret the winged sun-disks as Θ - letters symbolizing theos, Theodosius II, and Theophilus, and are rewarded by the doors of the temple springing open and a flood of gold pouring out. With the emperor's permission, they use the gold to build a new martyrium in Alexandria. Westerfeld has discussed this as a literary text signalling 'a uniquely Egyptian mode of thought and representation' positioned within the discourse of early Christian literature, while at the same time considering its value as an historical source (2003; see also Kákosy 1982). The story's suggestion that temples are full of ready gold is echoed in the Theodosian Code, with its declaration that 'all places that were assigned by the false doctrine of the ancients to their sacred rituals shall be joined to the property of Our privy purse ... the fruits from such places shall be extracted from the unlawful possessors thereof' (16.10.10.1, quoted in Westerfeld, 8).

Both the edict and the story point to official encouragement of taking 'the fruits' from sacred places, and reusing them for legitimate religious ends. This is what might be termed 'sanctioned plunder'.

The manuals for treasure-hunting from medieval Islamic Egypt document one level of engagement with the ancient tombs (El Daly 2005, Chapter 3), but there are several issues with treating them as historical evidence for the practice of tomb robbery. Firstly, while the manuals themselves often make reference to 'treasure' and it is quite reasonable to call them 'treasure hunting manuals' (their titles are sometimes more lyrical[216]), this terminology in itself distances the activities concerned from notions of robbery or vandalism, and instead situates them as adventurous explorations. Secondly, they are *texts* written by scholars for a highly educated and obviously literate audience; they cannot be argued to reflect attitudes or behaviour of other social groups.[217] The connections between the state and the exploitation of the tombs, which El Daly documents, were frequently

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[216] e.g. the 'Book of the Treasured Pearls and Hidden Secret on Indications, Cachets, Burials and Treasures' (Kamal 1907).
[217] Al-Jobri (d 1264) does claim that treasure hunting was an activity indulged in by rich and poor (El Daly 2005, 38).

justified by the ruler using ancient treasure for the common good, from Ibn Tulun's hospital, mosque and other building projects, to the towns, housing and canals built by king 'Zalma' in the anonymous tenth century *Akbar al-Zaman*.

Apart from the hunt for treasure, medieval interest in alchemy may also have prompted a small number of scholars to investigate tombs. Alchemy was known as the 'science of the temples' (*'ilm al-barabi*; Vereno 1992) but tombs also figured in its foundation myths – for example the *Risalat al-Sirr* ("Circular letter of the mystery") maintains that it was found under a slab of marble in a crypt, written on a golden tablet placed beneath the head of a dead woman, in the time of al-Ma'mun (AD 832).[218] The processes of alchemy were directed at transformation, of matter into gold, which ties in with the pursuit of 'treasure', and of death into life; in Hornung's succinct formulation, 'All alchemic work thus boiled down to bringing Osiris back to life through [from] decay and putrefaction' (2001, 39). The pursuit of *mumiya al-qubur*, mumiya of the tombs (El Daly 2003; 2005, 95-100), for its multiple magico-medical uses, points to extensive intervention into tombs and takes tomb robbery to a new level in which its object is the body of the deceased rather than his/her goods. Intriguingly distinct from the separate practice of 'treasure-hunting', the sources on the mumiya trade raise many unanswered questions. Was it a casual, local enterprise, or centrally organised? Al-Baghdadi al-Ifada comments 'The people of the countryside bring it to the city and it is sold for very little. I bought three heads full of it with half a dirham' (*Al-Ifadah*, trans El Daly 2005, 97). The mumiya trade, like tomb robbery described as an industry, appeared to flourish despite the injunctions in the treasure-hunting manuals not to disturb or even touch the dead (2005, 40), and despite the evidence from Ibn Iyas in 1513 that a man was sentenced to death for breaking into tombs and selling their occupants to foreigners for mumiya (97). Does this indicate a fundamental ambivalence about the integrity of the tomb and intrinsic rights of the dead, and if so, is this a new development, or a natural progression of the Christian anchorites' way of treating ancient bodies? El Daly (105-6) proposes a direct link between the

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[218] Another perspective on the sources of alchemy is found in MacCoull 1988, where she suggests that 'much of what was disguised with occult-sounding language as "alchemy" was in fact simple craft technology - trade secrets' (1988, 101).

mumiya trade and pharaonic preoccupations with consumption of the body, using as evidence the Cannibal Hymn (PT 273-274 and later version in the Coffin Texts, CT 573; Eyre 2002), and the deification of some parts of the body, to which other spells displaying anxiety about possible interference with the body could be added: 'Your head shall not be taken from you afterwards, your head shall not be taken from you forever' (CT 232).

The use of mummies in the magical papyri suggests that they were sometimes obtained from tombs:

'Do not pursue me, you, so-and-so, I am PAPIPETOU METABANES. I am carrying the mummy of Osiris, and I go to take it to Abydos, to take it to Tastai, and to bury it at Alkhah. If, NN, causes me trouble, / I will throw the mummy at him.'

(PDM xiv. 451-58 / PGM XIVb. 12-15; trans J H Johnson in Betz 1986, 221).[219]

But not eat it. A mummy could also be used in a formula to send dreams:

'You should write this name on a reed leaf with the blood of ... a hoopoe; you should put the hair of the woman in the leaf; you should put it on the mouth of the mummy; and you should write this name on the ground, saying: "Bring NN, the daughter of NN, to the house, to the sleeping-place in which is NN, the son of NN!" Now it is also a fetching charm.'

(PDM xiv. 1070-77; trans J H Johnson in Betz 1986, 246).[220]

The world of the magical papyri suggests fearless experimentation in the consumption of plant and animal products, from pepper to every kind of bird and animal dung; if mummies or their parts had a symbolic power, it is a reasonable supposition that the magician or his client would not recoil from eating them. Similarly if a taboo operated on

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[219] Spell titled '[A spell] for going before a superior if he fights with you and he will not speak with you'.
[220] Spell titled 'A spell to bring [a woman] to a man, to send dreams (another [manuscript] says, to dream dreams) again'.

consuming mummy, it would be logical to find this being manipulated by the practitioner of magic.

Rather than situate the mumiya trade within a general ambivalence about the sanctity of the dead, I would suggest that it lies at the frontier between local beliefs in the spirits of the tomb, and the economic pressures of a merchant-driven international trade which over-rode taboos and at the same time took advantage of villagers' familiarity and knowledge of the ancient cemeteries. The commodification of mummies as an ingredient in western medicine also formed one of the primary means of encountering ancient Egypt throughout from the medieval period onwards to the seventeenth century (Dannenfeldt 1985, 178; Schwyzer 2007, 151-174), when the distinction between pissasphalt and embalmed bodies was eventually clarified.[221]

[221] In Europe, the use of mumiya continued on a limited basis into the twentieth century (Dannenfeldt 1985; Camille 1999).

Figure 77 Mummy as an ingredient in western medicine, from Platéarius' *Le Livre des simples médecines*, 1520-30

Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Manuscrits occidentaux, Français 123228, fol. 191v.

The archaeological encounter with the tombs

Returning to the reaction of Carter and L'Hôte cited above (p. 270), it has become clear that the perception of 'plundering Arabs' should be contextualised against the competing agendas played out at the tombs. Simple greed for material wealth is often the principal reason given to explain the presence of local Egyptians at cemetery sites, using the authority of early travellers' accounts to confirm an entrenched position:

> Indeed, as I have already had occasion to point out, a traveller [Thevenot, in *Voyage au Levant*, p.431] in Egypt, about the year 1655, describes the Arabs of Saqqara as continually occupied in digging among the tombs of that Necropolis for the purpose of selling the objects which they might discover (Rhind 1862, 243).[222]

In terms of overt goals, the treasure-hunting manuals and the mumiya trade have much in common with the early days of archaeology. Fagan's synthesis of the disasters and cupidity of western archaeology remains the most compelling and fundamental study (1977), showing the rivalry between European nations, and among archaeologists, collectors and curators, for objects and prestige. What was different about the European scramble for antiquities was that it was largely done in the name of scientific investigation – the pursuit of knowledge.

This ambiguity about thirst for gold versus quest for knowledge is brought into sharpest focus in the many accounts of reactions to the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb: Carter emphasized 'gold – everywhere the glint of gold' (1923, 96) when he broke through the wall; Breasted was moved to tears by the sight of the 'treasures', as were several of the other early visitors to the newly discovered tomb (Romer 1981, 258). In the 1930s, Wainwright wrote without self-consciousness irony of his time as Chief Inspector of the Antiquities of Middle Egypt: 'I was constantly worried with applications for permission to dig for buried treasure...' (1931, 197). The treasure hunters are never stated to be

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[222] Rhind was even-handed in his criticism of Egyptian and non-Egyptian destruction of archaeology: '... in so far as the general aspect of the monuments themselves is concerned, it is of little consequence whether they are mutilated by the crowbars of a scientific commission, or by less learned chisels' (1862, 263). He also wrote an appeal for their urgent conservation (Rhind 1856); compare Gliddon's *Appeal* of 1841.

Egyptians, but they are clearly intended. He described the forces pressing on him: the educated treasure-hunter, armed with *Le Livre des Perles Enfouies et du Mystère Précieux*, and the uneducated diggers who typically broke through the false door 'thinking it to be the Sesame which will give access to the treasure chamber which they believe to exist' (196). He implies that this search for buried treasure, leading to vandalism of tombs, stretched back to the Islamic conquest: 'The untutored Arab had broken over the decaying civilized world, finding everywhere vast ruins of temples, statues, incomprehensible inscriptions and deserted cities; mysterious, incredible, unholy places and things ...' (196). Van der Spek's recent ethnography of the Qurna necropolis traces the overwhelming influence of one particular case, the 'Abd ar-Rasul tomb robbery of 1881, on the construction of the Qurnawis in particular as tomb robbers (2004). He argues that it is the archaeological literature, 'and its attendant negative views concerning populations inhabiting archaeological sites' (2004, Abstract) that has been responsible for the denial of any form of contemporary sociality in the Theban necropolis. The repercussions of this biased characterization continue to be felt, in the decision to remove the community to a new site in 2006 (see p. 301 below).

Archaeologists' defence of their right to take control of the cemeteries of Egypt, sometimes by living there as will be discussed below, has relied on the careful construction of the inhabitants of Egypt as 'tomb robbers', thereby forcing a dichotomy in the reasons for claiming tomb property between the competing factions of West and East. This division fits into the paradigm of orientalism (Said 1978). It is also a bland simplification of 'Eastern' interests in the necropolis, which encompasses a long history of state and mercantile exploitation of gold and mummies, the intellectual elite's project to advance alchemical research and antiquarian knowledge, and the fellahin's response to the ancient dead. I have suggested in this chapter that some ancient practices related to the dead were creatively reworked and partially transferred to the care of the dead, both ancestors and saints; the limited evidence we have for the fellahin's relationship with the ancient cemeteries suggests a degree of fear of the dead, together with belief in the magical power of the tomb and objects within it.

4.3.3 Benson's gloss on tomb robbery

If we look outside the official discourse of archaeological research, at the depiction of tomb robbery in western literary sources, complexity and ambivalence about the violate/inviolate tomb emerge. Popular fiction drew on reports of archaeological activity in Egypt for its themes and settings, but it also acted back on the authors of those reports. One way in which this happened was through personal contact. Authors and archaeologists in many cases belonged to the same social network: Maspero wrote to Rider Haggard, who was friends with Wallis Budge (Addy 1998), and whose influence on Egyptology was such that Emery was drawn into Egyptology at the age of thirteen by reading Haggard's novels (Dawson and Uphill 1995, 139). The powerful role of popular fiction in shaping cultural values means that the majority of archaeologists went into the field with their ideas and especially their attitudes formed not only by the scholarly tradition, but by the images of the archaeologist, the ancient Egyptian, and the modern fellahin as they were depicted in magazines and novels. In this way, archaeological fiction has a constitutive role in the discourse of tomb robbery.

There is a large corpus of English-language fiction inspired by Egyptian themes (Haining 1988; Daly 1994) but in the case of tomb robbery, E F Benson is of special relevance. Benson (1867-1940), the Edwardian novelist best known for his satirical stories featuring comic heroines Mapp and Lucia and set in the rarified society of Rye in Sussex, had a secondary career in archaeology; he excavated in Luxor with his sister Margaret Benson between 1895 and 1897 (Figure 78 below).[223] His experiences there provided material for half a dozen short stories set in Egypt that he wrote between 1905 and 1933,[224] which touch on attitudes towards tomb robbery in a number of interesting ways. These stories are of particular interest because they are informed by a kind of ethnography of the archaeological scene itself in Luxor.

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[223] See Peck 2007*b*, and Peck's biography of Margaret Benson at the *Breaking Ground: Women in Old World Archaeology* website. Peck's articles rescue Margaret Benson, the first woman to gain permission to direct her own excavation, from undeserved obscurity.

[224] *The Image in the Sand*, 1905; 'At Abdul Ali's Grave', 1912; 'Dummy on a Dahabeah', 1913; 'The Ape', 1917; 'Professor Burnaby's Discovery', 1926; 'The Step', 1930; 'Monkeys', 1933.

Figure 78 View of the Benson and Gourlay excavations at the Temple of Mut, Karnak, 1896

Photography by H B Gourlay. From Benson and Gourlay 1899, pl. 5

'At Abdul Ali's Grave' concerns the death of an old man in Luxor, the search for his missing fortune, and the attempt to raise him from his grave using magical techniques.[225] Archaeology and robbery of modern graves are set in counterpoint; the villain of the story is 'the notorious Achmet, who is well known here to be practised in Black Magic, and has been suspected of the much meaner crime of robbing those lately dead. For in Egypt, while to despoil the bodies of ancient kings and priests is a privilege for which advanced

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[225] Peck (2007) points out that the story was probably inspired by an incident in the archaeologist D G Hogarth's life, described in *Accidents of an Antiquary's Life* (1910): 'I once explored a Graeco-Roman cemetery near Alexandria with as willing a Moslem gang as heart could desire. But one of my men ate apart from his companions and had no fellowship with them. He was by far the best digger of them all; none so light of hand as he, so deft to extricate fragile objects from one grave, and to find his way into another. I foresaw a useful *reis*, [head man or supervisor] and said so to the overseer. He listened in silence, and at evening asked leave to speak. The rest, he said, would leave me sooner than take orders from this man. He was a good tomb-digger; but where had he learned his trade? In the modern cemeteries of the town. He stole grave-clothes. I did not make him a *reis*, but paid him off the next day – why or with what right I hardly know' (Hogarth 1910, 154).

and learned societies vie with each other, to rob the corpses of your contemporaries is considered the deed of a dog' (1912, 90-91). The story does not use overtly pharaonic tropes, but a kind of lychnomancy similar to the divination described by Lane, and which of course features heavily in the London-Leiden Magical papyrus, leads the European narrator and his companion to the tomb of Abdul Ali. There the stones used in the magical rite are 'two black cubes... found to be graven with curious characters' (106), so malignant that they have to be thrown into the Nile. 'Curious characters' suggest hieroglyphic inscriptions, thus Benson picks up on the theme of the power of the past in magical practice among the fellahin, and on the taboo on robbing graves, questionably broken by advanced and learned societies. The story suggests that we break these taboos at our peril. Respect for the dead is a central concern in Benson's fiction – he has Madden the archaeologist carefully re-bury the bodies, once the necklaces and scarabs have been removed, in 'Monkeys' (1933). When Madden's surgeon friend Morris steals some vertebrae from the mummy of A-pen-ara, showing a unique metal repair, revenge is exacted by a protective ape-spirit. The body and wishes of the individual, expressed through the mechanism of protective curses, override intellectual gain. These stories play on lingering fears of the Gothic imagination, the 'uncanny' in the Freudian sense of what should have remained secret and hidden but has come to light (Moshenska 2006), while exploring the fantastic consequences of day-to-day archaeological practice.

Gautier ('Le Pied de Momie', 1840[226]), Poe ('Some Words with a Mummy', 1845), Alcott ('Lost in a Pyramid; or, the Mummy's Curse', 1869),[227] Conan Doyle ('The Ring of Thoth', 1890, 'Lot No. 249', 1892)[228] absorbed and experimented with information

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[226] First version published in *Le Musée des Familles* in 1840; variants discussed in critical edition by M Crouzet (Gautier 1992). The source for the story is found in Denon 1803.
[227] Republished and discussed in Montserrat and Alcott 1998.
[228] In 'The Ring of Thoth', Conan Doyle's Egyptian guard at the Louvre appears to be opening up the beginnings of a critique of European archaeology:
'"Are you the same Vansittart Smith who gave a paper in London upon El Kab? I saw a report of it. Your knowledge of the subject is contemptible".
"Sir! cried the Egyptologist."' (1890, 53)
However, the museum guard then explains that he is 'not one of the down-trodden race of slaves who now inhabit the Delta of the Nile, but a survivor of that fiercer and harder people who tamed the Hebrew, drove the Ethiopian back into the southern deserts, and built those mighty works

coming back from tomb excavation in Egypt. All develop the trope of conflicted archaeologists and the breach of modern or post-classical taboos on reentering tombs, which solidified into the more repetitive theme of 'the mummy's curse'.[229] Conan Doyle ('Lot No. 249') presented his Egyptologist as a 'crank', whose fellow students find his interest in mummies 'beastly and morbid. I wish he would drop it ...He knows more about these things than any man in England. But I wish he wouldn't!' [sic]. Alcott's heroes, 'Professor Niles' and Forsyth, get lost in the great pyramid and desecrate the mummy of a woman in order to make a fire, and later pay for their actions.[230] Poe's satirical short story 'Some Words with a Mummy' features an urbane mummy who is revived with electricity, only to reproach the antiquarians for their rough treatment of his body.[231]

Petrie's comment on the fellahin in *Ten Years' Digging in Egypt* (1892) serves as an example of the archaeologist's perception of difference between himself and contemporary Egyptians:

> It is always difficult to realise the state of mind of another person, even of one who is perhaps an equal in education, and who has been reared amid the same ideas and surroundings as one's own, but it is impossible to really take the same standpoint as one of another race, another education, and another standard of duty and morals. We cannot, therefore, see the world as a fellah sees it; and I believe this the more readily because after living the most part of ten years among the fellahin, and being accused of having gone some way toward them, I yet feel the gulf between their nature and my own as impassable as ever.
>
> (Petrie 1892, 167)

---

which have been the envy and the wonder of all after generations' (54). In other words he is an ancient rather than a modern Egyptian.

[229] For a detailed treatment of the development of the 'curse of the pharaohs' concept, see Day 2006.

[230] Forsyth says to his fiancé who has just dropped the gold box removed from the body: 'Nay; don't reject the poor little mummy's treasure. I have never quite forgiven myself for stealing it, nor for burning her' (Montserrat and Alcott 1998, 75).

[231] 'What am I to suppose by your permitting Tom, Dick and Harry to strip me of my coffins, and my clothes, in this wretchedly cold climate? In what light (to come to the point) am I to regard your aiding and abetting that miserable little villain, Doctor Ponnoner, in pulling me by the nose?' (1845, 365). Williams suggested that the mummy, Allamistakeo, represents a text which speaks back (1983, 1).

Amazingly, Petrie experienced little difficulty in identifying with the ancient Egyptians, as will be shown below.

4.3.4 Living in the tombs once again

They will live in the necropolis.
The wretched will make riches...

The *Prophecy of Neferti*, (trans. Parkinson 1997, 138)

During the nineteenth century, the ancient tombs were still occasionally occupied by living Egyptians - Vivant Denon described the occupation of Theban tombs by unknown but resistant locals: 'Soon after noon day we arrived at a desert, which was the necropolis or city of the dead ... we were assailed with javelins and stones, by enemies whom we could not distinguish' (Denon 1803, Vol 2, 86); on a later visit the French drove out the tomb inhabitants. This type of account may describe a moment in the long tradition of spoliation, for treasure or valuable substances such as mumiya, or the occupants of the tombs may have been fugitives.

The way in which several key nineteenth and twentieth-century western archaeologists lived and worked in tombs has erased some of the historical layers of the palimpsest in archaeological discourse, while constituting a new layer. The growing field of the historiography of Egyptology as a discipline reflects the significance, even parity, of this layer: 'Many of Egypt's ancient monuments resonate as strongly from their associations with great Egyptologists as from their uses in antiquity' (Thompson 1996, 53). Tomb residents include Champollion, Rossellini and L'Hôte in the tomb of Ramesses IX in the Valley of the Kings, between 1829 and 1838; (Figure 79; Clayton 1982, 130; Harlé and Lefebvre 1993, 262-3); Norman de Garis Davies in the tomb of May at Amarna (Figure 80; Aldred 1982, 92), Garstang and his team at Beni Hasan (Figure 81; Garstang 1907); and the Petries at Giza, Abydos and western Thebes (Petrie 1856; 1892; Drower 2004).

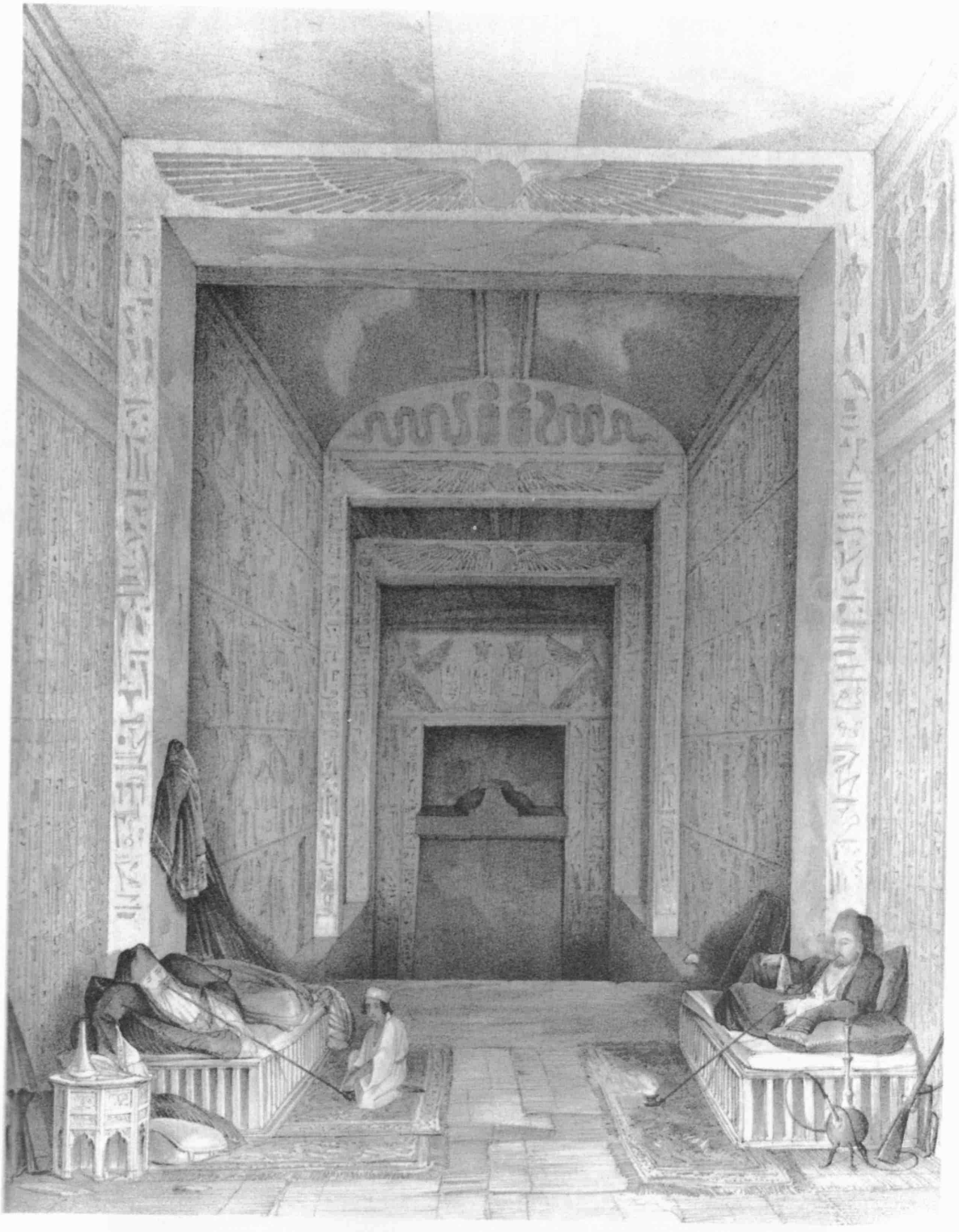

Figure 79 The tomb of Ramesses IX, 1832-33; Jones and Goury smoking

The servant is drawn to a smaller scale, perhaps an unconscious nod to Egyptian conventions rather than those of orientalist art. *Interior of the tomb of Ramesses V [IX] 1832-33*, from Moore, Jones and Goury 1843, pl. 18

Figure 80 Norman de Garis Davies outside 'his quarters', the Tomb of May, Amarna, 1901-1907

Photograph by Horst Schliephack, courtesy of EES archive

FIG. 12.—A CORNER OF THE CHAMBER IN WHICH WE LIVED.

Figure 81 Garstang's 'airy and comfortable quarters', Beni Hasan, 1902-1904

From Garstang 1907, fig. 12

The experience of living in the tomb itself gave rise to a peculiar sense of the immediacy of the pharaonic past. Convenience is usually given as the reason for this practice, but a side benefit may have been that it enabled the excavator to bypass Islamic culture, which held little interest for him/her, and to form a direct imaginative connection with 'Egypt of the Pharaohs'.[232] Petrie's letter of 15 March 1884 from Tanis gives a clear indication of this: 'Now I must try to give some idea of my house ... The materials are charmingly antique, and in fact I live in the remains of past ages actually and metaphorically' (in Drower 2004, 53). From Giza, where he was photographed outside the tomb he lived in (Figure 82), he wrote: 'I am paying special attention to the methods of workmanship here [the Giza tombs], and trying as far as possible to get into the minds of the old people; for that is the only way to realise what they intended, and how they looked at things' (11 February 1881; Drower, 23).

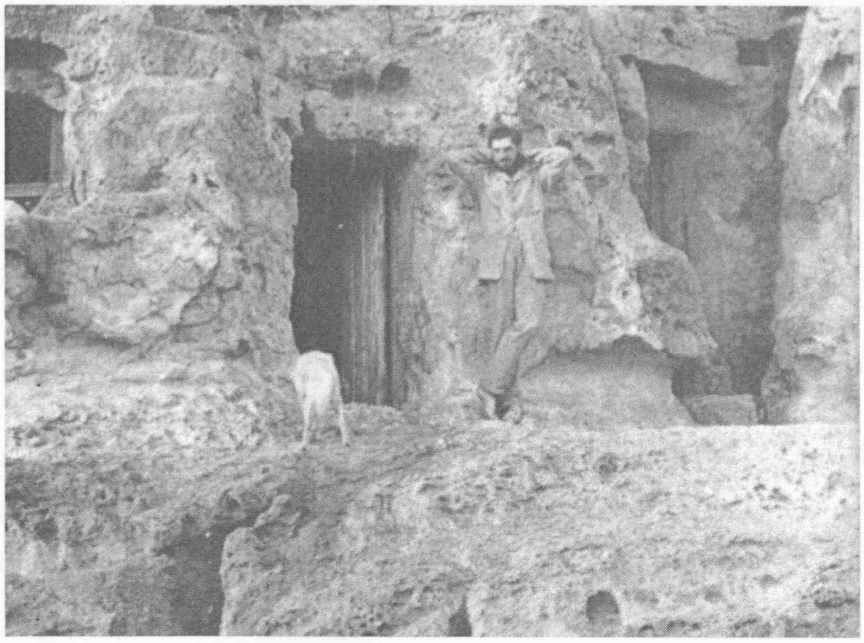

Figure 82 'My Tomb at the Pyramids': Petrie outside his rock tomb at Giza in 1880

Petrie lived in this tomb during the Pyramid Survey. From Petrie 1931, pl. opp. 20

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[232] This interpretation does not fit Winifred Blackman during the period she lived in a tomb at Meir, because her fieldwork did focus on the fellaheen. Arguably she acquired a sanctified status from her choice of habitation, not unlike Duff Gordon's residence in Luxor Temple, which enhanced her reputation as a healer (see Section 4.3.5 below).

Stating that it was 'impossible' to 'see the world as a fellah sees it' (1892, 167; see p. 284 above), Petrie in his tomb could 'get into the minds of the old people'. Petrie wrote evocatively about his choice of dwelling, playing on the romantic and morbid aspects of the tomb:

> Wherever we may settle the first business is to get quarters to live in, and to gain the confidence of the people. There are no cheerful notices of "Apartments to Let," there are no hotel touts to greet you; if you are in a rocky place you may be tolerably certain to get an ancient tomb-chamber or quarry excavated in some cliff-face, and no better lodgings are to be had anywhere for solidity and equable temperature; the minor advantages may be a question of taste, such as the gratis supply of ancient bones or mummy-cloth in the dust and sand of your floor ... Each of these [other types of] dwellings has its advantages, but the tomb is the best.
>
> (Petrie 1886, 440-41)

Here he turns the appropriation of the tomb into a humorous traveller's tale. Certain tombs near major archaeological sites changed hands so swiftly they became virtual hotels. Sophia Poole, Edward Lane's sister, wrote:

> We were not the only dwellers in tombs during our stay near the pyramids; for a row of sepulchral excavations, which Colonel Vyse and his party occupied in 1837, are now inhabited by a Nubian, who has taken possession of them to afford lodgings (for a small remuneration) to travellers. Also at a short distance from our grotto, an Arab had taken up his abode in a similar but better tomb.
>
> (Poole 2003, 152)

Edward Lane had lived in the Nubian's tomb during his long visit in 1825 to the pyramids at Giza. Lane also lived in another tomb hotel, the remarkable Wilkinson house on Sheikh 'Abd al-Qurna at Thebes during the 1820s. This 'house' was originally the tomb of 'Amethu, governor of Thebes and vizier in the reign of Thutmose III (TT83); Wilkinson and Hay remodelled it, and Disraeli, Salt and Bonomi visited. The tone of the various diaries and correspondence in which they describe their feelings about living in the tombs express an almost gleeful triumphalism. For example:

> ... never was the habitation of death witness to gayer scenes.... the odour of the mummies had long ago been dispelled by the more congenial perfume of savoury viands (Hoskins writing about Thursday evening parties at Hay's house/tomb, in Thompson 1996, 57).

During my stay at El-Ckoor'neh I could obtain no other wood for cooking; & sometimes my servant brought, for this purpose, cases so beautifully ornamented that I was reluctant to allow the cook to make use of them (Edward Lane, in Thompson 1996, 57).

These remarks, even making allowance for the conventions of the period, seem odd for scholars devoted to discovery and elucidation of the past.

A series of eminent Egyptologists lived in the house, but some time in the second decade of the twentieth century the additions were dismantled and the house reverted to its original appearance. Such reversions have been described thus: 'substantial portions of the outer structure had disappeared, doubtless carried away by the Qurnawi who applied the wood and mud bricks to their own houses' (Thompson 59). The Qurnawi have recycled rather than erased western archaeologists' presence in the tombs, contrasting with Naville's erasure of the Coptic remains at Deir el-Bahari (Davies 1982, 56-7), or the Islamic remains at almost any site dug in Egypt up until the late twentieth century.

4.3.5 Living in the temples

Few archaeologists whose project or concession was a temple, rather than tomb, site have been known to take up residence there. It would be easy to suggest that they preferred a comfortable hotel available at sites within modern settlements, or a dig-house imbued with the history of former archaeologists (Beit Emery at Saqqara, the Somers Clarke house at Elkab), but there are two interesting types of temple reoccupation which may suggest other factors influencing this pattern. Both can be related to the distinction between tomb and temple reoccupation outlined in Section 3.3 above. This indicated that during the Christian reoccupation of Abydos, different strategies operated, the tombs becoming the site of intense spiritual and social contests, while the Osireion and Temple of Seti I, more public spaces, remained in use as the home of an oracle, and subsequently a female ascetic community who took over responsibility for measuring the Nile. Reuse of many of the temples in the modern period has taken firstly the form of *collective*

Egyptian reoccupation, in which whole villages have grown up within temple precincts, and secondly of western women living or working on their own.[233]

Figure 83 The capitals of a colonnade shown above a dwelling place, Luxor, 1839

Watercolour by William James Müller, BM PD 1878-12-28-151

Collective reoccupation began at a number of temples in the Roman period, some Coptic towns such as Djeme at Medinet Habu, and Atbo in and around Edfu temple, continuing to be active well into the Islamic period (Badawy 1978, 28-33). Despite the implications of the hagiographic literature, many temples smoothly transitioned into their new role as habitation sites (Grossmann 1994; Dijkstra 2005, 152-3). When western travellers first encountered many Egyptian temples, they found them occupied by large Arab settlements. Denon describes the portico of the temple at Esna encumbered with dunghills and 'deformed' by 'mean huts and hovels' (1803, II, 104), while Edwards referred to the settlement at Edfu temple as the Augean stables, which Mariette, in the role of Hercules, had 'cleansed' (1982 [1888], 400-401). The archaeological history of most of these

[233] The occupation of the temple of Akhmim by Dhu Al-Nun Al-Misri (d. 861; see El Daly 2005, 163-4), supposedly for the purpose of studying the alchemical knowledge enshrined in the reliefs and inscriptions, is currently the only documented example of scholarly temple occupation in the pre-modern period. El Daly suggests that he may be representative of a larger trend (2005, 51).

temple reoccupations is therefore almost completely lost; the language of archaeology refers to 'clearing' tombs and temples, which has meant in effect erasing all traces of non-pharaonic, and until relatively recently, Coptic, use.

The women who lived 'alone' in the temples tended to be outsiders in one way or another: Lucie Duff Gordon at Luxor, Amice Calverley and Dorothy Eady (Omm Sety) at Abydos (Duff Gordon 1983; Frank 1994; B S Lesko; Sety and El Zeini 1981; Cott 1987; Hansen 2002*b*). Duff Gordon lived in a house on top of the debris within Luxor Temple, originally built and occupied by Henry Salt, Belzoni, and later Flaubert. In her day the house coexisted with a mass of dwellings, all of which except the mosque (which still remains) were removed in the 1880s by Maspero (Duff Gordon 1983, xiv). This demolition is described in a footnote in Edwards' *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile*:

> The fellaheen refused at first to sell their houses... After twelve months of negotiation, the fellaheen were at last bought out on fair terms, each proprietor receiving a stated price for his dwelling and a piece of land elsewhere, upon which to build another. Some thirty families were thus got rid of, about eight or ten only refusing to leave at any price. The work of demolition was begun in 1885. In 1886 the few families yet lingering in the ruins followed the example of the rest... [After Maspero's resignation, Grébaut continued the demolition] ...with the result that in place of a crowded, sordid, unintelligible labyrinth of mud-huts, yards, stables, alleys, and dung-heaps, a noble Temple, second only to that of Karnak for grandeur of design and beauty of proportion, now marshals its avenues of columns and uplifts its sculptured architraves along the crest of the ridge which here rises high above the eastern bank of the Nile.
>
> (Edwards 1982 [1888], 143-44 n. 1)

The last European to share life in the temple with the thirty Egyptian families loved her decrepit quarters, on the roof of the temple's portico: she referred to the house as 'my Theban palace' (xiv), with the same unselfconscious possessiveness as Petrie referring to 'My Tomb at the Pyramids' (Figure 82, p. 289 above). Despite the witty and optimistic tone of Duff Gordon's letters, her own purpose in living in the temple was to try and slow the progress of tuberculosis by wintering in the fine dry climate of Upper Egypt. Paradoxically, she herself became known as a *hakima* (doctor), successfully treating many victims of an epidemic in 1864 (1983, 157-162). Medical problems, especially

those of female patients, in nineteenth-century Egypt outside Cairo were usually referred to the *daya*,[234] whose pre-eminence was challenged by the women's medical school founded by Antoine Clot in 1832: 'To Clot-Bey, the *daya* was the symbol of the whole complex of "old-wives medicine" with its magic potions, charms and incantations, and he did everything in his power to undermine her persistent popularity' (Kuhnke 1974, 199). Duff Gordon fitted in to the framework of female folk and professional *hakimas* on donkeys both through force of personality, and her accessibility at the temple of Luxor.

Calverley also used the temple as a frame for her serious commitment to the health issues of the local community: 'Several times a week, "after about nine hours' work in the temple, Miss Calverley conducted a clinic for the people of the village, who came to receive sulfa ointment for a baby's sores, bandages for damaged limbs, and simple remedies and advice for scores of ailments"' (B S Lesko, 3-4). Calverley's work for the Egypt Exploration Society at the Temple of Seti I, seen in the four lavish publications funded by John D Rockefeller Jr. and published by the Egypt Exploration Society and the Oriental Institute in Chicago (Calverley 1933-59; volumes V and VI are still unpublished), required years of unrelenting effort; her artistic skill, and that of Myrtle Broome, was widely admired (Breasted 1933, 231). Just before her epigraphic work was broken off in the autumn of 1948, she carried out a mass inoculation of the villagers and foreigners at Abydos against cholera (Gower 1959, 86). To a certain extent, the temple context in which Duff Gordon and Calverley practised basic (but western) medicine gave them authority. Both women lived unconventional lives for their time and in relation to their background, yet at the same time they engaged with the lower levels of the palimpsest of the temple as a traditional centre of healing.

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[234] *Dayas* are described by Kuhnke as 'untrained folk midwives' (1974, 193), whereas Naguib refers to the *daya* as 'la sage-femme' (1993, 50), and gives an interesting account of her ambiguous role in the community: 'D'autant plus que la sage-femme traditionnelle se trouve souvent accusé de sorcellerie, de charlatanisme, de brutalité et d'ignorance' (50). This partly stems from her 'polluted' status, which the hospital obstetrician escapes.

4.3.6 Summary of the biography of the tomb in the Islamic period

The post-depositional history of the tomb shows an intermittent engagement over millennia with all the earlier cultural layers of the palimpsest, comprising a pattern of both rejection and adaptation of the lower layers. The physical and social re-use of tombs created a constant exposure to the original pharaonic texts, imagery and re-enacted memory of the meanings clustered around the tomb, as well as to all the subsequent phases of use. This complex palimpsest of behaviour and material evidence shows a selective process of transmission at work, and its modes and patterns can be usefully compared and contrasted with the re-use of the temples. More importantly, the biography of the tomb demonstrates the integration and inseparability of 'high' and 'low' knowledge. Some of the mobile practices – such as pilgrimages, festivals, visiting the dead – were more successful in resisting erasure than the tangible structures embodying a relationship with the past (for example villages in temples), with the final annexation of tombs as dwellings by western archaeologists expressing an intellectual takeover through the takeover of property. In 'clearing' the tombs, with all the emphasis on dirtiness, untidiness and pollution (recalling Douglas' definition of dirt as 'matter out of place'; 1984, 41), the intention has been to create a pristine version of the pharaonic past, founded on the dogma that the past has no connection with the present inhabitants of Egypt.

The kind of palimpsest Sayce recorded in a remote spot in Nubia negates this view:

> A little northward of Dirr in Nubia I once fell across an interesting instance of the continuity of a cult. A few yards to the south of a rock-tomb of the age of the Nineteenth Dynasty is a niche in the rock with the remains of a small image of the dead man, and a shelf in front of it, cut out of the rock, on which offerings could be placed for his *Ka* or "double." The offering is still made, and the bowl which I saw there containing the durra of the offering varied but little in shape from the bowls that were used in the days of Rameses II. But in these modern days the offering is made to the "Shêkh" Isa, who is no other than Jesus. That is to say, the cult must have continued without break from the age of the occupant of the tomb down to our own time, the only variation being in the name of the person to whom it has been addressed. In pagan Nubia it was paid to the *Ka* of the dead Egyptian, in Christian Nubia to Christ, and when in the 12th century Nubian

Christianity was extirpated by Mohammedanism, Christ was transformed into a Moslem saint (1906, 199-200).[235]

What I have tried to suggest about the problematic positioning of modern mortuary practices as low knowledge (and ancient practices as high knowledge) intersects with a separate debate within Islam about the role of the veneration of saints. Stauth suggests that the literature of *Islamwissenschaft* has moved towards a more inclusive stance: 'By emphasizing the balanced and even intermingled co-existence of "high" and "low", "official" and "popular", "scholar" and "saint-orientated" visions and practices in Islam, recent evaluations of religious practice would appear to acknowledge this' (2004, 10). This is exactly what Shoshan asked for in the context of his study of medieval popular culture in Cairo: 'in the final analysis, a refined approach to the history of culture should transcend the "-chotomous" view, the tendency to emphasize the dichotomy between "high" and "low" (Shoshan 1993, 77-8). This thesis argues that the dichotomy is not only a conceptual problem within the discussion of any given period, but is essentially a diachronic process.

[235] It is less surprising that this extraordinary account has received little Egyptological attention considering that it lies on the same page as a paper on elf-shooting in the north-west of Ireland.

5 Conclusion: Transmission and the palimpsest

how can you scratch out

indelible ink of the palimpsest
of past misadventure?

H.D., *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944)

Well-wrought this wall: Wierds broke it.
The stronghold burst . . . .
Snapped rooftrees, towers fallen,
the work of the Giants, the stonesmiths,
mouldereth.
Rime scoureth gatetowers
rime on mortar.
Shattered the showershields, roofs ruined,
age under-ate them.
And the wielders and wrights?
Earthgrip holds them - gone, long gone,
fast in gravesgrasp while fifty fathers
and sons have passed.
Wall stood,
grey lichen, red stone, kings fell often,
stood under storms, high arch crashed -
stands yet the wallstone, hacked by weapons,
by files grim-ground . . .

The Ruin, 8th century (trans Alexander 1991, 2)[236]

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[236] *The Ruin* describes the magnificent architecture of a deserted city, probably Aquae Sulis (Roman Bath). The poet is impressed, puzzled, and disconnected from those who are 'fast in

5.1 Usurpation and Quotation

'[Bodies pass away] since the time of the god,
Others come in their places.'

From the 'Song of Paser', TT 106 (trans Lichtheim 1945, 203)

Like tomb robbery, 'usurpation' is a socially constructed category that is often used uncritically to describe re-use, and to define it as wrongful. The usurpation of texts tends to refer to the replacement of one royal name in a cartouche by another – the later king supposedly unfairly claiming credit for his predecessor's deeds or building works. Ramesses II is the outstanding proponent of this technique, but his recycling of his father's and grandfather's monuments does not necessarily suppress or denigrate their memory, as some scholars have pointed out (Rondot 1997, 151). Besides the practice of royal usurpation of temple inscriptions, there is the frequent usurpation of mortuary goods, and finally, of entire burial spaces: the usurpation of tombs. In the biography of Djer's tomb (Section 3.3 above), I have suggested that the tomb was not 'usurped' by the cult of Osiris in the Second Intermediate Period; rather that its use and interpretation were transformed, all the while keeping the physical location tied in to a social network of ritual, festival and pilgrimage. The reuse of a place, or even an object, can thus be situated within a narrative of remembering and animating the past - of respect, rather than neglect.[237]

This 'respect' in the dynastic period can be inferred from a number of practices. It can be seen in the reuse of objects which belonged to others, and which probably came from burial contexts, such as the reinscribed bowls of Raneb (Fischer 1961, 46-47) and the thousands of other stone vessels redeposited at the Step Pyramid (p. 149 above). It may be deduced from the reburial and reconstruction of bodies, not just at Thebes in the case

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gravesgrasp', reflecting the break in cultural continuity that led to the frequent characterization of the built enviroment as 'the work of giants' in Anglo-Saxon poetry. It is difficult to find similar mystification about the meaning of dynastic Egyptian structures in Coptic sources, because there was no comparable fundamental break in cultural continuity.

[237] This argument for respect responds to the characterization of reuse as the opposite of respect, in Baines and Lacovara 2002.

of the reburial of royal mummies in TT 320, and of 'Menkaure' at Giza (BM EA 6647; see Boughton 2006), and the priests at the Bab el-Gasus, but in the careful mending of ancient bodies with resin, bandages, and splints, for example of the Graeco-Roman period mummies at Kellis (Gray 1966; Aufderheide et al 2004). Above all, it may be seen in the repeated use of tombs for reburials in the dynastic period, and their eventual transformation into living spaces for ascetics in the Christian period.

The latter transformation calls into question the practice of so-called Christian iconoclasm and vandalism routinely referred to in the literature, where it is identified as part of a Mediterranean-wide 'aggressive deconsecration process' (Bayliss 2005, 45; cf Bayliss 2004; Caseau 2001). The reuse of tombs and temples such as Tomb D69 at Abydos and the Osireion and Temple of Seti I (Section 3.3.1 and 3.3.3 above), with their additions of drawings and graffiti, shows a degree of intentionality and responsiveness to the previous uses of the site, for which there are a number of parallels elsewhere. One example is the temple of Edfu. When the original publications were revisited by Cauville and Devauchelle (1985) after more than fifty years, something striking was noted. Not only was there an absence of Coptic vandalism, but there were signs of the Copts leaving 'marks of the second hand' as Bianchi (1987) observed:

> Most of the figural decoration has been effaced, an act of vandalism usually attributed to the Copts, the early Christians in Egypt.[238]That theory is difficult to reconcile with the fact that some scenes here escaped unscathed, particularly in the Vestibule where, in at least one instance, **a graffito appears to have been neatly, intentionally, and somewhat piously placed beneath the image of the falcon-headed god** (pl. 34).
>
> The **reverence** which the Copts extended to other temples, such as that of Isis from Dendur now re-erected in New York City, is remarkable indeed because these reveal no signs of intentional mutilation to the figures despite the fact that the pagan temple had been converted into a church.[239]

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[238] Bianchi references Cauville 1984, 14.

[239] Bianchi references Blackman 1911, 36-37 and pl. CIV, 2. Ironically, it was the Temple of Dendur now sitting in the heart of Manhattan, rather than a structure standing in place in Egypt, that prompted Meskell to call for the writing of a biography: 'Dendur Temple has a unique biography of its own that remains to be fully narrated. This requires moving our scholarship beyond the instance of creation, the date and place of fabrication, toward the constitutive knowledge of the object and its accrued meanings through time, and the object's participation in forms of ongoing social life' (Meskell 2004, 207).

Either the Copts were inconsistent in their programs of defacing pagan monuments or the sources(s) of such vandalism must be identified elsewhere (Bianchi 1987, 550-551, emphasis added).

Figure 84 Mural representing St Peter painted over Egyptian relief in the cella of the temple at Wadi el-Sebua'

From Badawy 1978, fig 4.19

It seems, however, that in certain cases the Coptic artist tolerated the *status quo* and incorporated his paintings into the Egyptian murals in such an expedient composition that the saints now receive the offerings presented by the Pharaoh to the former gods (Badawy 1978, 247).

Figure 85 The Temple of Abahuda, converted to a church. Photograph by Friedrich Koch, January 17, 1906

The temple proved impossible to dismantle in the 1960s, but the reliefs covered by Christian frescoes were cut out and rescued (Usick 2002, 12). From <http://magazine.uchicago.edu/0606/features/nubia.shtml>

Such latent signs of 'reverence' continually undermine the traditional narrative of destructive Copts intentionally 'mutilating' the material remains of dynastic Egypt, in parallel with their rejection of the religious and cultural inheritance (see Figure 84 and Figure 85). If we shift our expectations away from this perspective, the lack of damage ceases to surprise, and it becomes possible to observe connections and relationships between the record of the re-occupation of tombs and temples, and the original

decoration, inscriptions and functions.[240] The reused pharaonic structures detailed by Jullien (1902), Deichmann (1939, 1954) and Coquin (1972) invite further study and assessment of relationships between superimposed and underlying texts and figures; the work on reused tombs is only beginning (Burkard, Mackensen and Polz 2003; O'Connell, forthcoming).

Far less attention has been given to the evidence of Arabic graffiti at ancient sites, a rare exception being Vachala and Ondráš' publication of a six-line multi-author inscription on the pyramid of Neferefra at Abusir (2000). Even though this partially tenth-century inscription 'has always been and still is clearly visible and legible', the authors note 'it has been completely ignored by visitors to the Abusir necropolis' (73). This suggests that the post-conquest textual layer of the palimpsest of other pre-Islamic sites has also been disregarded, and waits to be documented. In some cases, it is too late - the material record of the last two hundred years' occupation of the hillside and tombs of Qurna was almost completely destroyed this year.[241]

The handful of examples of the reoccupation of tombs by Muslim saints (Section 4.1.5 above) indicate that continuity from the Coptic reuse of dynastic burial places was rare. Instead, some pilgrimages and *mawlid*s show a relationship with pilgrimage routes and celebrations in dynastic Egypt, such as the Abydos pilgrimage and Opet celebrations (p. 187; p. 258-9 above). Aspects of dynastic tree cults were assimilated into the cult of Muslims and Coptic saints; in the case of the *Shajarat Maryam*, the cult continued at the same place (p. 208 ff). Elsewhere, the concept of the soul of the deceased, or a god, is transferred into the belief in the residence of a saint within a tree. The recognition of the

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[240] Compare Horden and Purcell's development of the *Annaliste* concept of the *longue durée* to encompass place and structures such as temple, church and tomb, '...in practice infused with changing structures of meaning by ritual and observance' (2000, 422).

[241] The story of the voluntary and involuntary relocation of the Qurnawis is accessible through the pages of the Qurna History Project (www.qurna.org), the debate on the Egyptologists Electronic Forum ('Qurna farewell'), and a number of news reports, e.g. Peter Popham, 'Valley of the Bulldozers: death on the Nile', *The Independent on Sunday*, March 20 2007 ('the concern of the tourist business is not the living but the dead, and the longer they have been dead, the better'); Michael Slackman, 'Peasants living above treasured tombs defy eviction from mud homes', *Scotland on Sunday*, April 1 2007.

presence of the spirits of the dead in the ancient necropolis was assimilated into a range of beliefs in the *jinn* and *'ifrit*, both threatening and benevolent presences (Section 4.3.1). Finally, regular performance of a mortuary cult, the *Tala'*, incorporated remembrance, appeasement and food offerings, transposing elements of the ancient mortuary cult to the new Coptic and Islamic cemeteries.

5.2 Barthes' 'quarrel of the Egyptologists'

The transmission of texts within the pharaonic period, as the House of Life shows, is framed in unequivocally *positive* terms, both within the texts and in the literature about them; copying, quoting, and referencing the past are indications of its value (see Section 2.5). This sense of rereading can be juxtaposed with the reuse of the monuments. In 1951, Barthes' attention was drawn to a quarrel, as he termed it, that had broken out within the Egyptological community. Varille had put forward the idea that the reused material at Karnak temple was the evidence of an attempt to transmit esoteric knowledge: 'tout est transmission symbolique d'une sagesse millénaire, à la fois manifestée et cachée, selon une démarche bien connue des mentalités prélogiques' (1993, 108). The response from academia and French intellectuals was at first a stony silence, then a rejection of Varille's ideas as 'puérilités' and 'fariboles' (1993, 109). Another attempt to question the simple explanation of convenience in reusing building material was made by Goedicke in his discussion of the pyramid of Amenemhet at Lisht (1971, 169; p. 158 above), this time avoiding the concept of esotericism and focussing on the idea that it showed an affinity and respect for the owners of the original monuments. The palimpsestual history of tombs outlined in the foregoing chapters implies a conscious engagement with the past uses of particular spaces, and with past practices in the transfer of tomb-related practices in the Islamic period, during which saints' tombs and trees in Muslim cemeteries became a focus for care of the dead and resolution of personal anxieties.

The representation of interrelationships (rather than continuities, or the lack thereof) between post-conquest Egypt and the Christian and dynastic periods has been explored in this thesis through sometimes marginal evidence: jottings in diaries, ghost stories, travelogues, amateurish photographs, handfuls of sand and dust. Regarding western

constructions of the relationship between 'low' and 'high' knowledge in Egypt, and the juxtaposition of the present and past, it has been argued here that the evidence has been filtered through a number of lenses. One of these draws together the Freudian palimpsest referred to in the Introduction (p. 21) and a final example of this kind of marginal evidence, which has in fact exerted a powerful influence on perceptions of usurpation (p. 298), 'plundering Arabs' (p. 271), 'unclean spirits' (p. 180), *et cetera*.

The imagist poet H.D., who published her radically intertextual novel *Palimpsest* in 1926,[242] referred to ancient Egypt many times in the memoir of her analysis with Freud, which took place in Vienna during the 1930s (H.D. 1985). Like many other cultured Westerners, she saw Egypt through pre-embedded European images, specifically those of Gustave Doré (Figure 86 and Figure 87 below):

> We talked of Egypt. I spoke of the yellow sand, the blue sky, the beetle-scarabs. Then I said that Egypt was a series of living Bible illustrations and I told him of my delight in our Gustave Doré, as a child (1985, 119).

Freud immediately saw her error of logic: 'He said how fortunate I had been to discover reality "super-imposed" (his word) on the pictures' (1985, 119).

Doré's influence in shaping European visions of Egypt cannot be underestimated, both through the immensely popular Bible mentioned by H.D., and the permanent exhibition of his works at 35 New Bond St, one of the obligatory sights of London between 1869 and 1914 (Boase 1966, 360-61).[243] Duff Gordon rejected these visual images, peeling off

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[242] The idea of the palimpsest would seem to be Freud's: he published his note on it in 1914 (1900, 125 n. 2, added in 1914), and his paper on the mystic writing pad dates to 1925, only a year before H.D. published her novel *Palimpsest* in 1926 (Kloepfer 1990, 185). Freud recorded that he obtained a copy of *Palimpsest* on December 18, 1932, while Freud and H.D. did not meet until 1933, either socially or clinically (Letter from Freud to H.D., dated Dec. 18th, 1932, in H.D. 1985 [1956], 189-90; Silverstein 1988; Silverstein 'H.D. Chronology Part Four').

[243] Doré's influence continued into the medium of film: the Doré Bible (Gallery edition) was one of Cecil B. DeMille's favourite books as a child (Higham 1974, 7), so it became his primary visual reference material for *The Ten Commandments* (1956). DreamWorks' animated feature film, *The Prince of Egypt* (1998), recently also claimed direct inspiration from Doré. In the producers' own words, "'We got into a whole philosophical approach," says director Wells, who, with the other core members of the creative team, spent two [sic] weeks travelling through Egypt

the 'abominable little "Scripture tales and pictures'", but at the same time juxtaposing modern Egypt with her inner vision of antiquity, framed in the words of the King James Bible: 'It is impossible to say how exactly like the early parts of the Bible every act of life is here' (see p. 11 above, Introduction).

Figure 86 Gustave Doré, Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh (Exodus 7:10)

Courtesy of Felix Just, S.J., <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Dore.htm>

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and the Sinai Peninsula during pre-production. "Egypt and the world of the pharaohs is about building temples and monuments and the amassing of wealth and the act of doing things, if you like. Whereas the Hebrew way of looking at things was more to do with existence itself, and method of living."' (http://www.boxoffice.com/boxoffice_scr/boxoffice_story.asp?terms=2410).

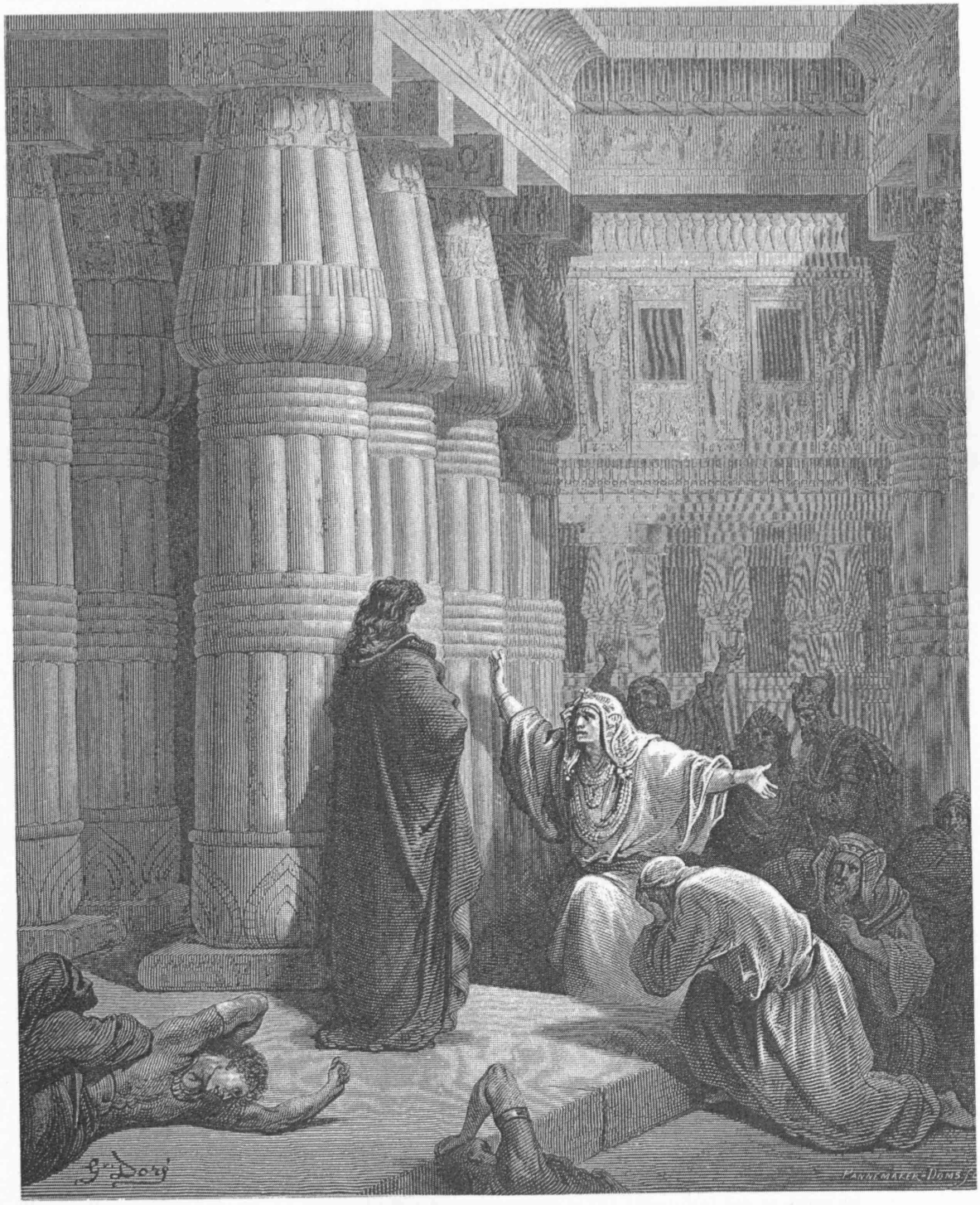

Figure 87 Gustave Doré, The Egyptians urge Moses to depart (Exodus 12:31)

Courtesy of Felix Just, S.J., <http://catholic-resources.org/Art/Dore.htm>

Although the western layer of the palimpsest (the occupation of tombs and temples, and the dominant historiography of dynastic Egypt) has always been mediated through images such as Doré's, and through texts from Rider Haggard to excavation reports and scholarly journals, forms of knowledge that do not correspond to a simple high-low knowledge dichotomy have been transmitted more directly at a local level in Egypt. Certainly ancient Egypt has been interpreted through modern Egyptian literature and architecture, through the academic output of Egyptian Egyptology, and through its use as a springboard for the pharaonist movement of the 1920s (see especially Haikal 2003; Wood 1998). However, the experience of living within the particular landscape, coupled with a very different kind of 'legacy' from that described by Glanville (1942), Harris (1971), and Rice (1997) – a legacy of ways of communal behaviour transmitted through families and social memory - has created a different level and type of access to the past.

The core misery of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was that people were denied permission to retain memories of their own past:

> All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary (Orwell 1983, 766).

Nineteen Eighty-Four has cast a long shadow over late twentieth-century scholarship as well as popular culture; the *Black Athena* debate produces accusation followed by counter-accusation over who is the true Winston Smith rewriting history.[244] Modern unease and anxiety about absolute historical truth being transformed into a censored or forged document, echoed by Herodotus' affectionate sobriquet 'father of history, father of

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[244] 'B. [Bernal] concludes his long review by criticizing me [Lefkowitz] for making an "emotional" appeal to George Orwell's description of how Winston Smith rewrites history in Nineteen Eighty-Four. It is not G.G.M. James who rewrote history, he suggests, but scholars like myself, who adhere to the "Aryan Model," and who "make a categorical break with all the previous history of the formation of ancient Greece." Here B. appears to be projecting onto me the insistent animus of his own writing' (Lefkowitz 1996*a*).

lies,'[245] runs completely counter to the evidence presented in this thesis for the transformational use of history, its monuments, texts, and rituals.

While the colossal has dominated western metaphors of ancient Egyptian civilization (Figure 88), the less easily photographed interactions with the past have been overlooked (Figure 89).

[245] Affectionate in the modern period; Plutarch's critique, *De Malignitate Herodoti* (trans. Bowen 1992) in which he set out to expose Herodotus' lies, was not affectionate.

Figure 88 The great pyramid, photographed by Francis Frith, 1858

From the V&A picture library; PH.744-1987

Figure 89 Egyptian women (left, in the distance) going up to the cemeteries, 1903

From Garstang 1907, fig. 1

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